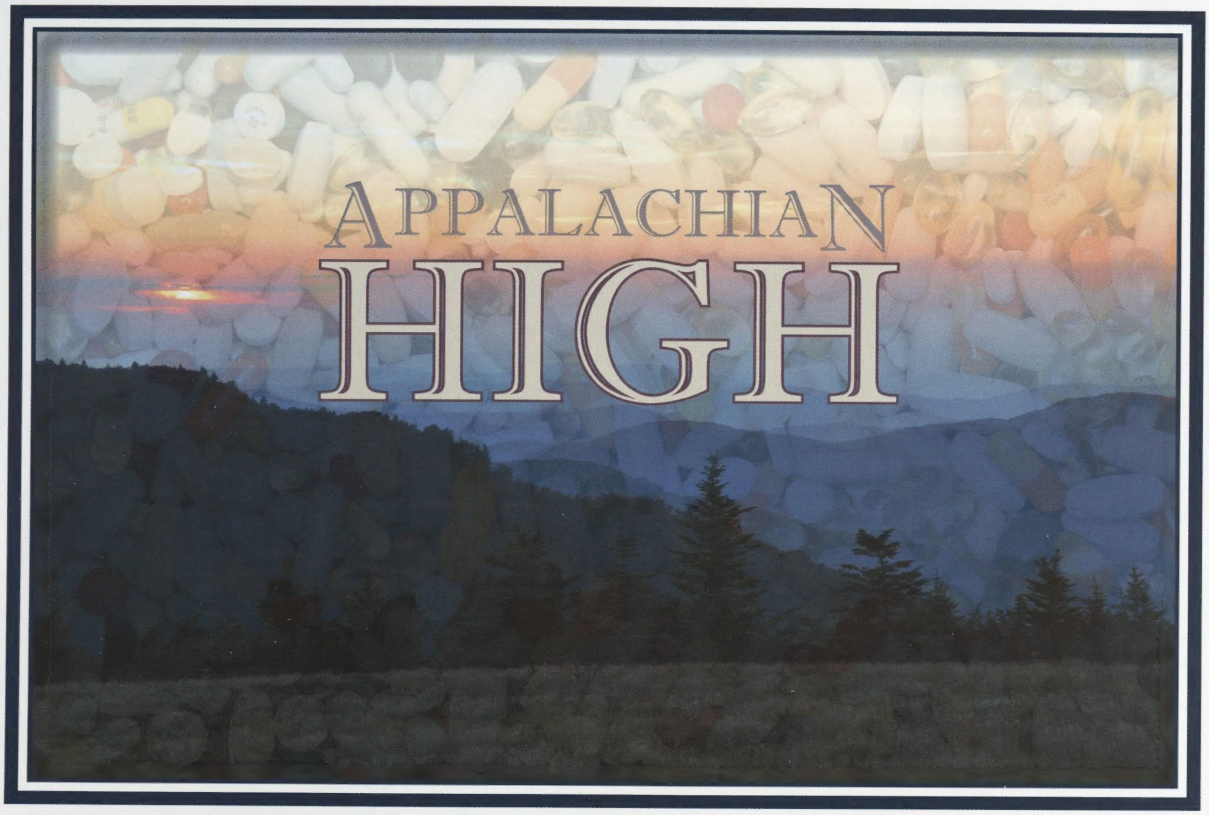
NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES ● EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Vol. 26 No. 1

$8.00



Alarmingly High *by* Robert Pack

High Life at the Beer Wash *by* James Watson

High on the Mountain *by* Marilyn J. Bossmann

High in Flight: Avian Appalachia *by* Caitlin Kight

NOW & THEN

Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.

NOW

Nina Fischesser of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Institute examines a gunshot-wounded broadwinged hawk.

See page 35 for a related article.

THEN

Northeast Tennessee locals show off a downed turkey vulture, circa 1910.

Photo courtesy Charlie Warden, from a glass plate found at a flea market.

ON THE COVER: *Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.*

Summer 2010
Volume 26, Number 1

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Now & Then: The Appalachian Magazine has been published since 1984 by the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University. The center is a Tennessee Center of Excellence that documents and showcases Appalachia's past, celebrates its cultural heritage, and promotes an understanding of the influences that shape its identity.

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UPCOMING DEADLINES

Getting Around
By August 31, 2010

The Greening of Appalachia
By March 31, 2011

ETSU
East Tennessee State University

TBR No. 260-112-09 1M
ISSN No. 0896-2693
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Designed by Randy Sanders and Heather Jones
Printed by Inové Graphics, Kingsport, Tennessee

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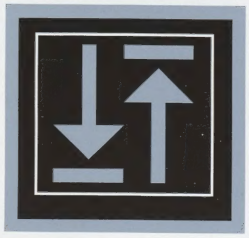
THE HIGH, THE LOW, AND THE IN-BETWEEN

ROBERTA HERRIN

DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES



The binary system of zeros and ones has created artificial intelligence and virtual worlds with avatars and farms, though virtual farms produce nothing akin to Jim Minick's blueberries or Bill Best's beans. The *Star Trek* android Data is the product of such a world. The perfection of artificial intelligence, he appears human in every respect but one: He cannot feel.

Human beings are also binary creatures living in a world of high and low, fast and slow, now and then. "Physical life is duple," writes Leonard Bernstein in *The Infinite Variety of Music*. "This is the symmetry our bodies are based on. We are creatures of the left and right, and in our center beats our heart, dutifully pumping its systole and diastole, 1-2, 1-2, as long as we live."

Human beings naturally extend the meaning of these dualities, creating metaphors such as leftwing and rightwing that emphasize opposition and pull us toward extremes. On the one hand, the extremes are valuable. Rappelling from the 876-foot-high New River Gorge Bridge would certainly shift my focus. When Jack climbed the beanstalk and entered the giant's world, he returned to the low ground with an "informed perspective."

On the other hand, there is danger in excluding the middle ground, the territory between the bridge and the river, the mountain peak and the valley. Jack's climb up that stalk and his rapid descent may have been more instructive than the view from the top. Synthesis takes place in the middle ground, which adds a third dimension to the dual world.

Bernstein does not overlook this third element. He explores the role of "tripleness" in music, arguing that the "three-concept is almost as fundamental as the two-concept." He emphasizes the word "almost" because "three . . . is *not* grounded in our biological nature. It is not *physical* in its function." Tripleness "is the first and noblest exception to our natural savage instinct of left-right. Three is an *invented* number; an intellectual number, it is primarily an *unphysical* concept. Perhaps that is why 3 has always been so mystical a symbol to man, as in the Holy Trinity."

To an android, there is no in-between, wherein humanness is spawned. To be human is to understand simple opposites and, at the same time, traverse the complex middle ground that we call "grey area." How did we come to create so bland a term for the essential agent that transforms mere binary creatures into creative, struggling, feeling beings?

At our heart, we may be duple, but the triangle makes us human and mystical and spiritual. Appalachian high and Appalachian low and everything between comprise the Appalachian experience, which is not merely dual or oppositional but inclusive. Without the addition of an "emotion" chip, Data, the *Star Trek* android, can no more embrace the "high" of watching hawks from an old fire tower on the Blue Ridge Parkway than he can fathom the emotional contradictions of the Appalachian coal culture or suffer the "lows" of chemical addiction.

In the world of real farms, high mountains, blueberries, birds, and beans, we would do well to contemplate the irony of Bernstein's "intellectual," artificial, third number as the key to our *humanness*. ❖

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Fred Sauceman

This issue of *Now & Then*: *The Appalachian Magazine* explores various interpretations and nuances associated with the word "high," from the horrors of prescription drug abuse in the region to the adrenaline rush of jumping off a bridge in West Virginia, from raptor flight high overhead to the sugar "high" after swigging a Mountain Dew. From eating high on the hog in Alabama to a chilling view of devastated mountaintops, their height lessened by the practices of coal companies.

Those of us who work on *Now & Then* appreciate vague themes—themes as enigmatic as Appalachia itself. Several contributors asked us what we meant when we announced the theme "Appalachian High." We were intentionally elusive in our answers. Often we responded, "What does the phrase mean to you, and how would you relate it to the region?"

What started out, then, as an issue that would primarily explore prescription drug abuse in these mountains evolved into much more, as writers like Michael Joslin and Caitlin Kight sent us stories about the flight of raptors and songbirds. Bill Best offered up a modern-day Jack-in-the-Beanstalk parable. Ronni Lundy weighed in, through fiction, on the dangers of the nicotine high. James Watson drove high up on Roan Mountain to visit a beer joint and live music venue once home to a car wash.

Along the way, we meet the first popularly-elected woman mayor in the state of Virginia, who profited from the friendship and encouragement of writer Sherwood Anderson. We revisit the life of Mahala Mullins, to balance the truth and the legend surrounding this most famous Melungeon. And we return to West Virginia with singer Bill Withers, still "high" on his homeland after a long life in California.

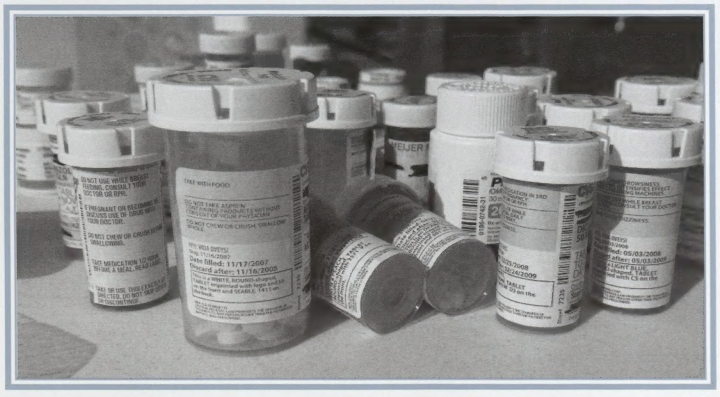
We hope for similar kinds of creative thinking as we contemplate our next theme, "Getting Around Appalachia." ❖

Images courtesy (left to right): Michael Joslin, Charlie Warden, Randy Sanders, Charlie Warden, Digital Library of Appalachia.

ALARMINGLY HIGH:

Prescription Drug Abuse and the Pill Pipeline in Appalachia

Robert P. Pack



Over the past decade, prescription drug abuse has cut a destructive path through Appalachia. I've been a close witness to that destruction. I've seen friends and acquaintances struggle and die, youth and young adults turn to theft and prostitution, families weakened and destroyed, and whole towns transformed because of crime and violence.

One spring afternoon in 2002, I drove to Richwood, West Virginia, to do a focus group with teachers and community leaders on inhalant abuse—the huffing of gas, paint, and solvents to get high. I was a professor at the West Virginia University School of Medicine, and I had chosen to study inhalant abuse since West Virginia had the highest rate of youth "huffing" in the nation, about 40 percent above the national average. Over the course of the afternoon, the group provided some polite interest and some pretty good answers to my questions. All was going well, and I was going on about the risks and long-term consequences of huffing when one of the participants raised his hand and said, "You know, huffing paint and gas is a problem for a few kids around here. I have known one or two that had that problem. But, if you really want to help, you'll come to the local Narcotics Anonymous meeting with us this evening and hear about our real problem."

And so I went. At that meeting I heard stories that defy logic, tradition, culture, stereotypes, and sanity. Stories of housewives selling everything they own, including their bodies; stories of rural kingpins, invisible networks, and trips to Florida, Mexico, and Baltimore; and stories of friends and acquaintances whose lives ended tragically.

I spent the two-hour drive back to Morgantown that night in silence. If what they said was happening in their community was true, then we had a coming storm on our hands.

Truth be told, the storm was already raging. On the national level, celebrity pill addiction and overdose were beginning to be popular news stories. But our Appalachian story was altogether different. I started paying attention to the news in our region and started seeing dozens of articles about pill diversion, pharmacy theft, and overdoses. Meanwhile, my childhood friend, with whom I kept up regularly on the phone and with whom I visited frequently when home, dropped the bomb that he had a serious problem and needed help.

We started spending more time on the phone. Indeed, over the next few years we would spend dozens of nights talking about his addiction, and it was a shocking education for me. My friend had become a full-time doctor shopper and pill trader. He had an enormous physiologic need for pills, taking at least sixty a day, in carefully regimented sequences, to offset or enhance effects and side-effects. He was brilliant, and he was desperate. We talked about treatment and counseling. We talked about the effect his addiction was having on his family. We talked about risks and desperation. In retrospect, I wish I had driven to his house, put him in the car, and gone with him to the hospital myself. I didn't hear from him for several weeks, and I assumed all was going well after a recent

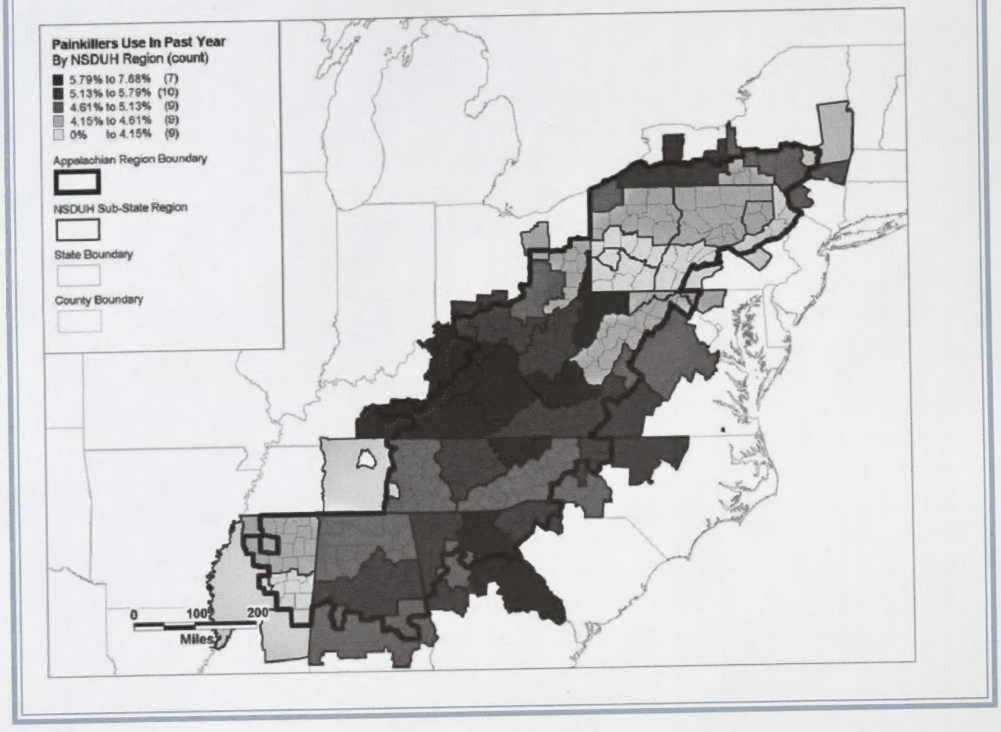
Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.

commitment to sobriety. When I got the call . . . and my father told me he had died, my academic curiosity instantly became a personal mission.

Epidemiology

According to the National Household Survey of Drug Use and Health, more than 30 million Americans have abused prescription pills in their lifetime, about 15 million have done so in the past year, and about 7 million are current, past-month abusers. Pills are the second most frequent "new" substance adults choose when they use drugs illicitly. They are the first most frequent new substance for youth. While the use of other drugs like marijuana and cocaine has decreased or stayed the same, illicit use of pills has increased by at least 30 percent in the past decade. The most frequently abused are pain pills such as oxycodone and hydrocodone, followed by sedatives, stimulants, and tranquilizers. Other regions of the country suffer from the same problem, to be sure; however, pill abuse is more prevalent in rural areas and in areas where there is more poverty and unemployment.

Map 2.19 Painkiller Use in Past Year, by NSDUH Sub-Region, 2002-2005



In one study of the problem in Appalachia, funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and performed by the National Opinion Research Center and East Tennessee State University, about 22,000 of the 19.4 million residents of the region were surveyed about their drug use. Researchers found that the region is consistent with the rest of the country in the misuse of pills: 5.6 and 5.9 percent respectively. But the Central and Southern Appalachian areas are higher: 6.4 and 6.2 percent respectively. Pockets of the region are incredibly hard-hit—especially coal-mining country (Figure 1). Rates of painkiller abuse in coal-mining regions approach 7.7 percent, and treatment rates for opiates are higher than the rest of the nation. Heroin use is presently lower than the rest of the country, but it is rising, specifically in coal-mining areas. While the phrase "Hillbilly Heroin" is used to describe OxyContin, Appalachia is increasingly having to contend with the real thing.

Admission to treatment from 2000 to 2004 for heroin abuse in people age twelve and older showed a steady decline nationally, dropping from 15 percent to 14 percent. However, treatment centers in Appalachia reported a steady increase in heroin treatment admissions from 4 percent to nearly 10 percent over the same period.

One reason is cost. Prescription drugs run between fifty cents and one dollar per milligram, for pills ranging from two to eighty milligrams per dose, whereas heroin is five dollars to ten dollars per dose, depending on its quality and the local market. A recent report in the *Los Angeles Times* indicated that black tar heroin syndicates seek out areas of the country where the pill problem is greatest and therefore have the highest capacity for heroin market growth. One method used by the heroin dealers is to find the local Suboxone or methadone clinics and approach the clientele as they enter and exit.

Most alarming is the fact that youth perceive prescription drugs to be much safer than other forms of drugs. For example, according to the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, about 40 percent of youth think prescription pills are safer than "illegal" drugs, and about 30 percent find nothing wrong with using prescription pills to get high. Each day, over 2,500 youth try prescription drugs for non-medical reasons for the first time. The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that in 2005, annual abuse of Vicodin was 9.5 percent among high school seniors, making it the most commonly abused drug by that age group. Additionally, OxyContin use has

significantly increased among high school seniors since 2001. The ARC-funded study shows that Appalachian adolescents have a proportionally higher reported rate (10.6 percent) of pill abuse than their counterparts in the rest of the U.S. (8.7 percent).

In a 2008 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Aron Hall and colleagues report a 550 percent increase in overdose deaths in West Virginia from 2002 to 2006. Their comprehensive review of death records revealed that pharmaceutical diversion (prescription drugs obtained illegally using a variety of methods, including theft, deception, and trade) was associated with 63 percent of deaths, and "doctor shopping" (going to multiple doctors to seek pills) was implicated in more than 20 percent of the cases. The authors also found that 93 percent of those who died had used prescription opioids, and 40 percent had taken methadone, a synthetic, often-abused opioid employed in the treatment of drug addiction. Only 44 percent had a prescription for the drugs they used.

We know where the pills come from—the supply side of the dilemma. They follow a clearly defined and regulated path from manufacturer to shelf. It would seem, then, that the problem could be corrected by clamping down on doctors and pharmacists, training them well, and making sure there is a good system in place to monitor prescriptions and their delivery. Regrettably, it is not that easy.

Around 2001 state-level Prescription Monitoring Programs (PMPs) began emerging in the fight against pill abuse. The presence of a state PMP was touted as a deterrent to diversion. Now, over thirty states have them, and they are providing good information. For example, we know that in 2008 more than 272 million hydrocodone pills were prescribed in Tennessee. That equates to 43.87 pills for each of the state's 6.2 million residents. We also know that it takes several minutes for a provider to get online and double-check the history of a patient suspected of angling for an illegitimate prescription.

If a provider is legitimate and the attempt to obtain an illegitimate prescription is careful, some pills will wind up in the wrong hands. But the market for pills is not being satisfied by "unwitting" physicians or even a few sloppy clinical care providers. Many pills do come from rogue physicians or "candy-man" doctors, but casual abusers of pain pills acquire most of their pills from friends or family. Only after a person is pretty highly addicted does he or she begin going to the "candy-man" doctors or the streets. In one survey, more than 58 percent of respondents reported getting prescription drugs from friends or family, and only about 7 percent said they obtained pills from "doctor shopping" or the streets. About 14 percent of callers to the West Virginia Quitline, arguably a more addicted clientele, reported getting their drugs from "doctor shopping" at least sometimes. In the Hall study, some 21 percent of the people who died from overdoses had been "doctor shoppers." Clearly, as the addiction progresses, the propensity to spend time acquiring the drugs intensifies.

Authorities believe most of the pills now on the street in Appalachia have come up the "pill pipeline" from pain clinics in Florida, resulting in an increase in street-level availability.

What to do

Prevention of diversion and treatment for pill addiction are desperately needed, but local efforts should be focused on prevention of pill abuse, beginning in the home: Educate yourself about the type of pills you and your family have been prescribed; monitor the exact number of pills that have a psychoactive effect (including pain pills with hydrocodone and oxycodone, sedatives, stimulants, tranquilizers, and many others); secure such pills with lockboxes; and if you have older pills that are potentially risky, put them in an old peanut butter jar, tape the lid shut with duct tape, and put them inside a bag in the trash. Do not flush them down the toilet, since they can wind up in the drinking water down the river or in the water table. Occasionally, pharmacies will hold pill drop-off days when you can dispose of them properly.

In your community, counsel people to monitor their prescription drugs, secure those drugs, and carefully dispose of unused doses. Encourage doctors to use prescription monitoring software. Engage in conversation with friends and family to dispel the myth that prescription drug misuse is safe.

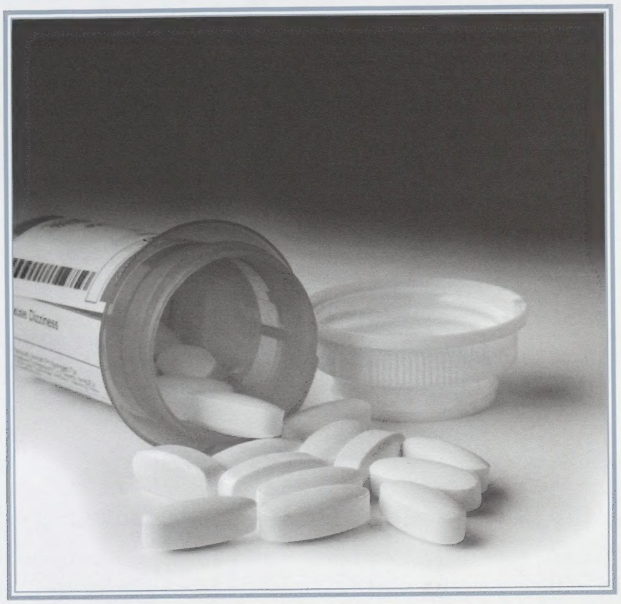
Such measures are necessary to combat the threat that prescription drug abuse poses to our heritage, our culture, and our way of life in Appalachia.

Dr. Robert Pack is associate professor of community health and associate dean for academic affairs at East Tennessee State University's College of Public Health. Caleb Lewis, a graduate student in public health at ETSU, assisted with this article.

THE WEST VIRGINIA PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE QUITLINE:

Help is Just a Call Away

Tara Surber Fedis, Keith J. Zullig, and Laura Lander



"Thank you for calling the West Virginia Prescription Drug Abuse Quitline. How may I help you?" On the other end of the phone, a soft voice says, "Can you help me? I never thought I'd be this way. What has happened to my life?"

For West Virginians lost in prescription drug addiction and for those who suffer alongside them, the start down a new path can begin with a phone call. In response to the growing epidemic of prescription drug abuse in Appalachia, and West Virginia specifically, the WVPDAQ (1-866-WV-QUITT) was developed and currently serves as a resource for prescription drug abuse education, treatment options, and support. As of March 1, 2010, over 1,000 callers have taken advantage of the services provided by the Quitline. During follow-up calls, approximately 20 percent of callers report obtaining a counseling or treatment appointment as a result of their interactions with the phone educators.

While every caller is different, they are not alone in the darkness of their addiction. "I just can't seem to get it together. I hate this about myself. I will take my last dollar, even though I know I shouldn't, and buy that pill." Aggravation, desperation, and frustration are common themes among Quitline callers. Many report beginning very innocently taking doctor-prescribed opioids for physical pain, others to relieve mental health symptoms such as anxiety. Eventually, when the doctor stops writing prescriptions, they find themselves dependent or addicted to the substance that once brought them relief. Now they find themselves desperately seeking their next pill: "I never thought it would get this far. I can't believe I'm looking for drugs."

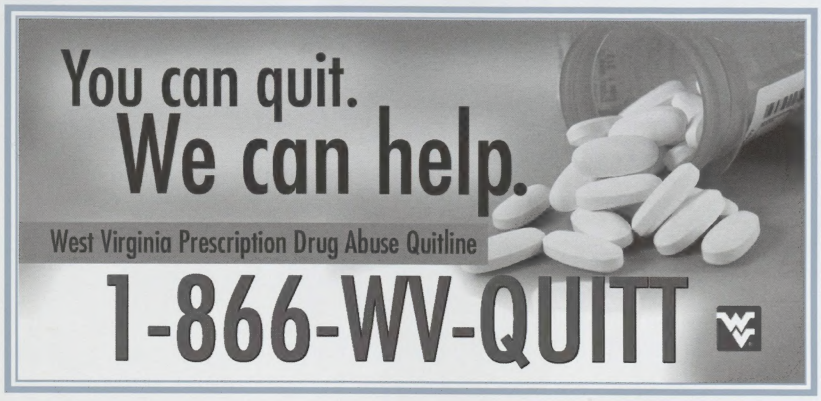
The Quitline helps callers through various means. For example, the Quitline may assist one caller through psychoeducation, while another may need assistance finding substance abuse treatment centers or community support such as Narcotics Anonymous. Others just desire a friendly voice, someone who will listen to their story.

On one snowy afternoon, a wife, tearful and determined, called the Quitline. "We just saw your commercial. Can you help my husband?"

"Danny" soon came to the phone and, after clearing his voice a couple of times, spoke of his addiction to "Oxys" and "Tabs." Five years ago, he was in an accident and continues to suffer with the

Photo courtesy West Virginia Prescription Drug Abuse Quitline.

pain. A business owner with no insurance, he took his original emergency room doctor's prescriptions for OxyContin until they were gone. Still faced with pain and not able to pay for surgery, he self-medicated with prescription drugs he could buy on the street. He knew he could not continue this way. Danny spoke about his



responsibilities, his wife, his children, and his team of employees who depend on him for their jobs. He was reaching out for help. The educator suggested treatment centers in his area and doctors who prescribe Suboxone (a drug used to treat opiate addiction). Self-help educational material was also mailed to Danny.

The Quitline offers up to three follow-up service calls for those interested in speaking with an educator again. Danny agreed to the first follow up seven days away. During the call, he expressed frustration, indicating that he had contacted all the treatment centers in his area and found that they had waiting lists, with some thirty to sixty days before an initial intake assessment could be scheduled. He called all of the doctors who prescribe Suboxone but was told they had reached their 100-patient maximum. Then the educator expanded the search to several local counties and found more treatment centers and doctors.

Danny agreed to a second follow up in four weeks. However, the educators had a difficult time reaching him for the follow-up call. Contact was attempted for several days via the phone number Danny had provided. On the sixth day, he called the Quitline: "Have ya'll been trying to reach me? I've been up on the mountain for a job and didn't have good cell phone reception. I see you've called several times."

The educator checked in with Danny to see how his search for treatment was coming along, and he reported that a treatment center had a bed available. He would be required to spend two weeks there and then continue his treatment on an outpatient basis.

"I just want this to start, to get through this, and get my life back," Danny said. "This life is hard and I'm tired, I'm tired of living this way."

A date three months out was set for an educator to call Danny. Standard Quitline protocol requires educators to make seven attempts to reach a caller for follow up. For Danny, it was the seventh attempt when he answered: "Hey, you called me back. It's good to hear from you. I made it!"

Danny was actively participating in outpatient treatment. Now he attends his treatment appointments as scheduled, sees a mental health counselor weekly to address behavioral habits and old thought patterns, and attends a Narcotics Anonymous meeting once a week.

Danny's family members have rallied around him and help him get through his toughest days. "My brother will pick me up some days and we'll go for a country ride in the old pickup truck."

He calls his mom more often now, and on Sundays, his family has started having sit-down meals together. He says his treatment has not only helped him but also his whole family.

Danny understands he is just beginning his life in recovery and knows he must keep his mind set on his goal of staying clean. He thinks of his past, looks ahead to his future, and tells the educator, "It can only get better from here."

There are many more people like "Danny" and his family who are struggling with prescription drug abuse. The Quitline team hopes to continue the mission of providing treatment resources, outreach, and research for the people of West Virginia. ❖

Tara Surber Fedis is program manager and lead counselor for the Quitline. Dr. Keith Zullig serves as a principal investigator and provides oversight for the research associated with the project. Laura Lander is the co-investigator and serves as clinical supervisor.

Assistance with this article was also provided by Dr. Rolly Sullivan, Rebecca White, and Bonnie Witmyer.

Billboard image courtesy West Virginia Prescription Drug Abuse Quitline.

PUBLIC HEALTH IN APPALACHIA:

The Perspective of One Hundred Years

How High is the Wall in Your Town?

Randy Wykoff

VIRGINIA HEALTH BULLETIN. 115
"It is well to spend millions for a navy to defend us against enemies that may never come. Let us not forget to defend our homes against the enemy that is always waiting to attack us—disease."

Figure 1

Sometimes, if we look back into history carefully enough, we can see the future. Such is the case with a remarkable little book called *Popular Talks on Preventable Diseases*.

On July 1, 1908, the State of Virginia transitioned its pre-existing State Board of Health to become a new State Department of Health. Over the course of its first year, the department issued a regular "Virginia Health Bulletin" (Figure 1). Early in the twentieth century, ten of these reports were bound into a small, green-covered book known as *Popular Talks on Preventable Diseases*.

While some of the topics such as typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria, hookworm, and smallpox seem distant from, and less relevant to, our world today, there is a remarkable amount of material in these 147 pages that is significant a century later.

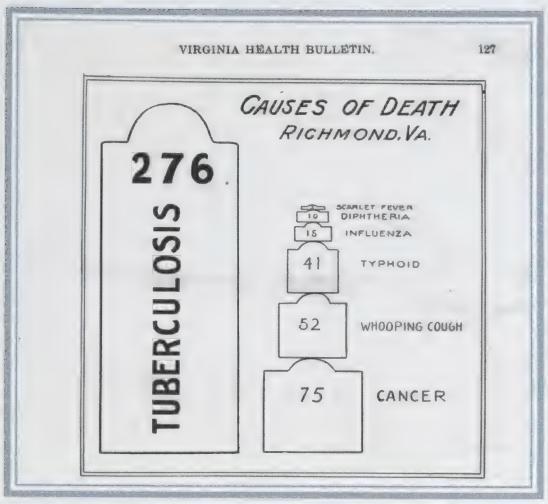
This may seem surprising when we consider how much has changed since 1908. During the last century, the entire practice of medicine has evolved so much that what physicians do today bears virtually no resemblance to what my great-grandfather Reuben Lindsay Robertson did as City Health Officer in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the time this book was published. In 1908, the population of Virginia was just over 2 million. Today, it is over 7.5 million. Life expectancy was about forty-seven years compared to seventy-nine today. Then, "one infant out of every five born in the United States dies before its first birthday," while today it is one out of every 159. According to the book itself, the leading causes of death in Richmond, Virginia, in 1908 were tuberculosis, cancer, whooping cough, typhoid, influenza, diphtheria, and scarlet fever, in that order, with tuberculosis accounting for over half the deaths (Figure 2, page 10). Only two, cancer and influenza, even make the top ten today.

Despite all of the differences, however, there is much to learn from this simple book.

Lesson 1: The main mission is educating the public

The leaders of the Virginia Department of Health in 1908 and 1909 clearly realized that their most important task was public education. Not only did they have articles designed for a non-professional

Figure 2



audience, but they also employed cartoons and diagrams that graphically and entertainingly expressed the most important messages from the book.

The authors understood the importance of having the public understand not only the existence of disease but the relative impact of it. For example, in writing about tuberculosis, the authors describe the disease both in human and economic terms:

> In the State of Virginia, it is estimated that nearly 5,000 people die of tuberculosis each year and that at least 20,000 people are suffering from it. To realize what this means, let one think of one relative or friend who has fallen a victim of this disease and the sorrow, suffering and misery attending it, then multiply this by 5,000 and the sum of human wretchedness wrought by this single disease in one year in our State will be realized.

Lest readers be too discouraged, the authors went on to say:

> Tuberculosis is preventable and can be made to disappear from the face of the earth. Tuberculosis is spread almost exclusively by those germs which are in the sputum of persons suffering from consumption, or tuberculosis of the lungs. If all the sputum from such cases were promptly and properly burned or disinfected practically no new cases would develop and the disease would gradually disappear.

Lesson 2: Our "modern" perspectives are not always new

The authors clearly saw their public health challenges in a way we would describe as "modern." These challenges included racial (Figure 3) and socioeconomic disparities in health. According to the authors, " . . . among some classes one out of every three children dies before its first birthday."

The authors understood the importance of being able to quantify health challenges in terms familiar to their audience, comparing, for example, the relative impact of the Civil War to the death toll from tuberculosis (Figure 4, page 11).

They devoted an entire chapter to "School Hygiene," claiming "every teacher and every member of a school board should have this Bulletin." They assert that "the school is a defense against ignorance and crime. It should be made equally a defense against disease."

The similarity to Tennessee's current Coordinated School Health System is remarkable. The system "encourages healthy lifestyles, provides needed supports to at-risk students, and helps to reduce the prevalence of health problems that impair academic success."

Lesson 3: Public health and prevention are essential for improving health

Perhaps the most startling message from the book is the fact that the authors understood how they could battle the most significant health conditions of their day—diphtheria, whooping cough, measles, and scarlet fever—without a single cure or preventative for these conditions.

This amazing book was published two decades before Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin, at a time when the only vaccines available were for smallpox and rabies. Despite all of the limitations of the day, the authors understood that they could protect, promote, and improve health.

Through a combination of "Popular Education about Disease," "Careful Physicians," "Efficient Health Officers," "Isolation and Quarantine of the Sick," "Antitoxin," and "Fumigation and Disinfection," the

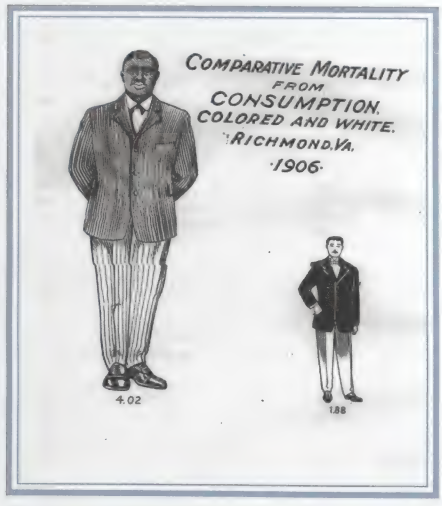


Figure 3

Figure 4

authors knew they could protect their children from the health scourges of their time (Figure 5). They didn't despair; rather, they asked, "How High is the Wall in Your Town?"

In the book, Dr. Charles O'Donovan, president of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, is quoted as saying, "At least a third of those who died annually in the United States die of diseases that need not occur; diseases that are almost crimes upon the city or State in which they exist."

A 2007 report in the *New England Journal of Medicine* supports this contention by suggesting that 40 percent of premature death in the United States is a result of unhealthy behaviors and thus completely preventable.

The deep and abiding faith of this simple book reminds us that we can apply what we know now—the basic principles of public health, expressed with a deep compassion for each other and more than a dollop of common sense—to make a difference in the lives of all people. In the very first chapter, the authors write, "Public Health is the foundation on which reposes the happiness of the people and the prosperity and power of the country."

The authors viewed the twentieth century, then in its infancy, as an age of unequaled promise:

> All thinking men know that in medical science as in all other departments of life we are at the beginning of a new era. We must be convinced of this when we consider the contrast between the industrial, social and commercial conditions and environments of our generation and of the generations preceding us . . . . The explorers of the mysteries of the human body and of the conditions and forces affecting its welfare, have their dividends and rewards in the steady increase in the average length of life and the addition of countless days of efficiency and freedom from pain and sorrow.

This optimistic view of the impact science was going to have on human health is an early recognition of the importance of both quality and quantity of life—concepts we think of in wholly modern terms today.

The authors understood then, as we understand now, that the real value of these advances should be in the prevention and not just the curing of disease. "The Department of Health," they wrote in 1908, "will devote its energies to the use and application of these discoveries to the promotion of knowledge of how to avert and prevent disease and its disastrous consequences."

They knew that there didn't need to be a technological solution. They didn't need to have a

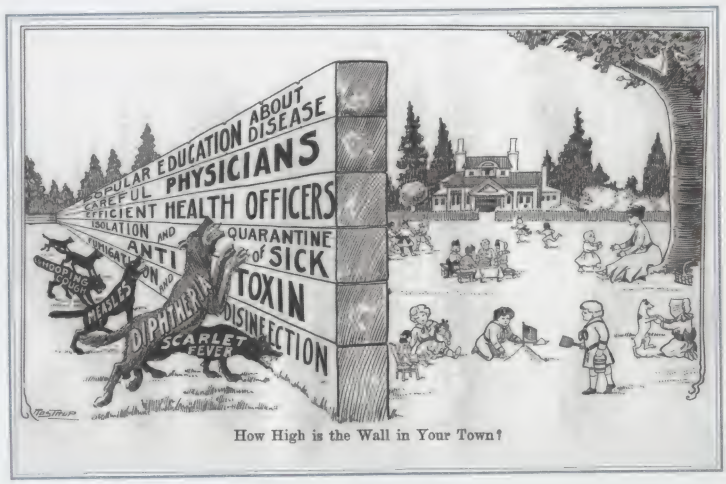


Figure 5

single, overarching intervention. They didn't feel a need to rely on a "magic bullet."

They just needed a wall—a comprehensive and systematic approach to apply what they ***did*** know to protect and promote the health of their citizens.

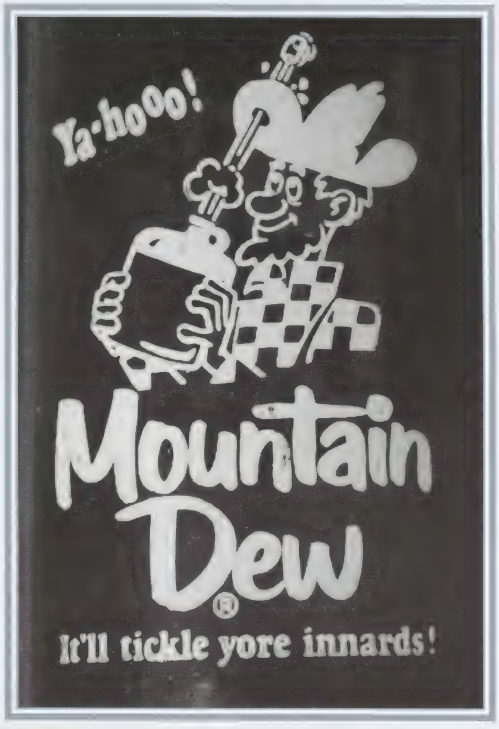
With all that we learned in the last century, and with all the medicines and vaccines we now possess that were unknown in 1908, we must adopt our forefathers' remarkable sense of optimism and commit ourselves to building a wall high enough to protect all the children of our town. ❖

Dr. Randy Wykoff is Dean of the College of Public Health at East Tennessee State University. He holds an M.D. degree from Tulane University.

All figures from "Popular Talks on Preventable Diseases."

APPALACHIA'S DRINKING PROBLEM

Chuck Shuford



The national media seem drawn to Appalachia like a ten-year-old boy to a tin can on a sidewalk. And usually with the same results. So I suppose we shouldn't have been surprised when in 2009 ABC's *20/20* episode "Children of Appalachia" trumpeted to the nation a regional addiction to soft drinks. During Diane Sawyer's pilgrimage to eastern Kentucky, the network dropped a new term into the American lexicon that will, I suspect, be forever associated with Appalachia: *Mountain Dew Mouth*. Dentists interviewed for the documentary pointed to central Appalachia's favorite beverage—it outsells all others by 35 to 40 percent, according to a regional Pepsi distributor—as the primary culprit in children's rampant tooth decay and tooth loss in the rural coalfield areas and a major factor in the region's leading the nation in toothlessness. Mountain Dew, developed in Knoxville, Tennessee, and first bottled commercially in Johnson City, contains much higher sugar, acid, and caffeine levels than most soft drinks—50 percent more caffeine, in fact, than Coke or Pepsi. Consequently, the documentary suggested, Mountain Dew is used as a type of anti-depressant for children.

At first blush, ABC seemed to be onto something. Certainly the images that *20/20* presented to nearly 11 million viewers are deeply imbedded in tragic fact. We're genuinely enamored of these syrupy, caffeine-laced, empty calories in Appalachia. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, much of Appalachia consumes 71 to 80 gallons per person each year, about 40 percent more than the average American. The hard-core drinkers in East Tennessee and eastern Kentucky gulp down 81 to 89 gallons per person, the equivalent of drinking eighteen 12-ounce soft drinks every week. In their defense it needs to be noted that Mountain Dew contains no heavy metals or mercury, unlike some of the drinking water in the coal regions fouled by strip mining.

Mountain Dew's parent company, Pepsico, initially offered a testy response to the ABC program, calling the report "old, irresponsible news," saying that it was "preposterous" to blame poor dental health on soft drinks, and urging people to use "common sense" when consuming their products. Common sense? While the beverage industry may create a public stance of encouraging customers to consume their products in moderation, their actions have historically belied that posture. Critics of the industry point to advertising focused toward children and teenagers in order to solidify lifelong brand loyalty and to play on their need to drink the brand that's "cool." And the critics are right. In 1999, Dawn Hudson, then Pepsi's chief of marketing, told the *New York Times* flat out that marketing aimed at 8-to-12-year-olds was a priority. In fairness, brand loyalty starts early, so Pepsi, among other soft drink companies, now places its logos on baby bottles. Research reveals that infants and toddlers

Photo courtesy Charlie Warden.

are four times more likely to be fed soft drinks from those bottles than from bottles with no logos. Pepsico's projected expenditure of $1.2 billion over three years to promote carbonated drinks in North America alone places the common sense/dollars and cents conundrum in context.

After ABC aired another report quoting Pepsi's callous remarks, the company issued a measured, sympathetic statement linking health and nutrition to poverty and calling it "heartbreaking" to see the impact of their products used excessively or inappropriately with little or no dental care. Pepsi also discussed how it might support efforts "to educate people in Appalachia about proper dental care and help them lead healthier lifestyles."

Let's try to put this soft drink scourge in some perspective without discounting its seriousness. Yes, people in the region consume soft drinks excessively, with profoundly negative consequences for their health. Fair enough. But is this trend so divergent from the rest of the nation? In 2007, *Science Daily* reported that soft drinks are now the single leading source of calories in the American diet. That may be appalling, but it shouldn't be surprising. USDA data indicate that per capita soft drink consumption in the nation has increased almost 500 percent over the last fifty years. One reason is that the beverage industry has steadily increased container size. In the 1950s the standard serving was 6 ½ ounces, which later became 12 ounces, now being replaced by 20-ounce servings. 7-Eleven markets promote the 600-calorie, 64-ounce Double Gulp, an amount that is about twice as much as the average human stomach can hold at one time.

The American Beverage Association made a big splash in May 2006 when it declared that sugary drinks don't belong in schools and announced an agreement with the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation to sell only water, unsweetened juice, and flavored and unflavored low-fat and non-fat milk in elementary and middle schools. Diet sodas and sports drinks would be sold in high schools. The reality, however, is that states had already been creating tighter standards for foods sold on school property which superseded the industry agreement.

One common element stands out among the regulations in Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia: There are no restrictions on vending machine sales after the school day. The mother of a student in eastern Kentucky sent me a photo of a vending machine at her son's elementary school that clearly had Pepsi and Mountain Dew (sugary, full strength) available. Purchasing anything but water during the school day results in detention, but a student staying after school for a sports event or an academic competition may purchase any beverage. While Kentucky has replaced sugar-laden drinks with "diet" drinks during the school day in high schools, caffeine levels are not regulated. Unfortunately, it appears that diet drinks are not a panacea. It's not just sugar that eats away at tooth enamel. The acid in diet drinks is also a culprit. And as odd as it may seem, research is showing that consumption of diet drinks leads to weight gain. Scientists aren't exactly sure why, but it may be that drinking anything that tastes sweet makes a person want to consume more sweets.

Tennessee has eliminated all carbonated drinks during the school day for pre-kindergarten through eighth grade students but has left high schools totally unregulated. The West Virginia Board of Education had successfully prohibited soft drink sales in public schools for years until the legislature passed a bill in the 1990s that allowed soft drinks to be sold in high schools. That bill also defined a "healthy beverage" as a juice with as little as 20 percent real juice. Rick Goff, executive director of the West Virginia board's Office of Nutrition, says of the beverage lobbyists who instigated the bill, "They would market to a fetus if they had the option."

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Perhaps the real story the media should be telling is not about a regional addiction to soft drinks, nor is it even about a region. Despite the national media's fascination with shaping the perception of Appalachia as a region whose residents are an anomaly within America, the reality is that the nation increasingly reflects conditions depicted by the media as peculiarly Appalachian. While some of the worst child poverty rates in the nation can indeed be found in rural Appalachia, the nation as a whole trails only Mexico in having the highest relative child poverty among twenty-five industrialized countries. Even as the media accurately depict unhealthy eating and drinking habits in Appalachia, they neglect to mention that the U.S. leads the world in per capita soft drink consumption, per capita fast food consumption, obesity, and hours per capita watching television, which has been shown to be a predictor of poor diet for future years. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that Type 2 diabetes, which used to be called "adult onset diabetes" because it

was practically unheard of in children, has become a sizable and growing problem among U.S. children and adolescents.

And, yes, Appalachia suffers from disproportionately high rates of substance abuse and mental health disorders, including the increasing abuse of prescription painkillers. Is this an aberration for a nation with some of the toughest anti-drug laws in the industrialized world? Hardly. In 2008, the World Health Organization reported that the U.S. recorded the highest use of illegal drugs in the world, especially cocaine and marijuana. It seems pretty clear from the study that higher income users buy cocaine, while those with lower incomes, like those in economically distressed Appalachian counties, turn to OxyContin, an opium derivative similar to heroin.

What about *Mountain Dew Mouth* in the rest of the nation? With dentists' fees rising far faster than inflation and more than 100 million people lacking dental insurance, the percentage of Americans with untreated cavities began rising last decade, reversing a half-century trend of improvement in dental health. Figures from the CDC show that in 2003 and 2004, 27 percent of children and 29 percent of adults had cavities going untreated. The level of untreated decay was the highest since the late 1980s and significantly higher than that found in a survey from 1999 to 2002.

One of the issues exacerbating dental problems in Appalachia is a dearth of dentists. In the nation there are almost fifty-nine dentists per 100,000 population on average (2004 figures), ranking the U.S. thirty-second in the world. In Appalachia the highest concentration of dentists is found in attainment counties (those counties with the strongest economies), but the average there is still only ten dentists per 100,000 people. In distressed Appalachian counties we find only four dentists per 100,000. Making the matter worse for those in poorer areas, only about one in four of the nation's dentists will take Medicaid payments.

In the areas of health care and public health, the U.S. has a contradictory record. We rank in the first tier (with at least twenty other countries) in terms of our citizens having access to clean water and sanitation facilities. And while we rank first in total health expenditures as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product, thirty-three nations, including Cuba, have a lower infant death rate than the U.S. Twenty-eight have a lower maternal death rate. America ranks twenty-fourth in healthy life expectancy. Most alarming is the fact that in each of these health-related categories, the U.S. position has steadily declined over the last twenty years.

The growing economic divide between Appalachia's rural counties and prospering cities reflects a growing inequality around the nation. Central Appalachia is testimony that unless the uninhibited pursuit of selfish interest is tempered by recognition of a common interest, our democracy may well collapse under the weight of intolerable inequities. As the nation continues to look more like the Appalachia depicted by national media, will the media notice? And if they notice, will they do the hard job of trying to explain how this is happening in the wealthiest country in the world? Or will they continue to resort to emotional but superficial commentary lacking any contextual understanding that might provide for some productive response? ❖

A North Carolina native, Chuck Shuford spent a career in social change philanthropy working for public grantmaking institutions and directing a private foundation that funds community organizing nationwide. He now resides in Knoxville, Tennessee, where he consults for non-profit organizations and foundations. He is a periodic contributor to the *Daily Yonder*, a publication that focuses on rural America.

AN R.C. DASH AND A MOONPIE TOSS

Anne Walker

Boosters in Bell Buckle, Tennessee, say the little town is "100 years behind the times and proud of it." Its residents celebrate Motorcycle Day and Daffodil Day, but Bell Buckle's claim to fame is a festival glorifying the legendary Southern pairing of a MoonPie and an R.C. Cola.

The R.C.-Moon Pie Festival has been going on for nearly twenty years, with different members of the Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce taking charge each year. For the past five years, Billy Phillips, vice president of the chamber, has organized the event, and for four of those years he has created the art that appears on posters, T-shirts, and other paraphernalia.

Phillips, a lifelong Bell Buckle resident, has witnessed the revitalization of the town, going back to 1971 when his parents purchased what is now called the Phillips General Store for $750. "Mom and Daddy Phillips" ran the store for nineteen years before retiring and turning it over to their son. But their retirement only lasted for a brief period before they started the Blue Bird Ice Cream Parlor, where they serve their signature Moon Pie a la Mode.

Each year, some 25,000 people visit Bell Buckle for the festival, which began when Ida Frances Wells, an antique store owner, wondered what the town could do to celebrate the seventy-fifth birthday of the Chattanooga Bakery, which has been making MoonPies since 1917. Captain Rodney Simmons, the current president of the Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce, decided to throw MoonPie a birthday party and invite R.C. Cola as a special guest, in recognition of the iconic coupling of the two products that once sold for a nickel each.

Seemingly at odds with the festival's glorification of sugar, the weekend's events include a ten-mile run and a Synchronized Wading extravaganza. The run begins at seven o'clock in the morning on a giant quilt painted on a parking lot. Referred to as "dry humor on a wet stage," the wading extravaganza is "a Broadway production done in a kiddie wading pool," as Phillips describes it. The play is written, directed, and choreographed by the mayor's wife, Carla Webb, who takes her inspiration from current events. Phillips recalls one year when *Titanic* was staged and the big MoonPie crashed into an iceberg.

Later in the day, competitors balance a bottle of cola on their heads, without using their hands, and run toward the finish line in the R.C. Dash. They toss MoonPies, clog, and attend the coronation of an R.C. King and MoonPie Queen. Vendors serve up deep-fried MoonPies, and at the end of the day, the World's Largest MoonPie Cutting-Ceremony takes place. The giant dessert, which is served to the public, spans four feet in diameter, is six inches thick, and weighs in at eighty-five pounds.

People come from all over the globe with the sole purpose of attending the festival. In 2009, three families from Australia showed up, and the year before a family from Korea made an appearance. Phillips says, "These are people who didn't just happen to be passing through. These are people who bought plane tickets, flew to the United States, and rented a car in Nashville, to come celebrate R.C. and MoonPies."

Some have chosen to get married at the festival; others just save their pieces of the giant Moon Pie as brides do with wedding cakes.

The R.C. and MoonPie Festival has grown beyond the organizers' wildest dreams. It is a call to the past and a remembrance of the role that sweetness has played in the life of the South. ❖

Anne Walker of Nashville, Tennessee, is a student at East Tennessee State University, where she wrote about the MoonPie Festival for a Foodways of Appalachia class.

Photo courtesy T.J. Hall, Bell Buckle Chamber of Commerce.

LEAH'S FIRE

Ronni Lundy

Leah is maybe all of three years old in the picture. Black itchy stockings rise out of dusty black shoes that lace up ankles as narrow around as the circle formed by a woman's thumb and finger. Her bangs are cut straight across, white, cotton-top, hair as fine as corn silk. Her pinafore, too, is white but dusty. Underneath is something black and long-sleeved, something that also looks itchy. Her right hand reaches back a little, blurred in the photo, as if she has, just gingerly, touched then jerked back from the Duroc that rises half again her height behind her.

Her daddy holds her left hand. Gid stands behind her and between her and the big red hog. He holds a rope in his other hand, wound several times to make it taut, to make sure the beast won't get away from him. He is grinning.

And she is laughing, that vast, crescent moon, head-thrown-back laugh of sheer delight, eyes crinkled in pleasure. You would know her anywhere by that laugh. No wonder Frank loved her. No wonder he married her. A woman who could laugh like that at his stories.

"I already look like trouble, don't I?" she says, half whispers, conspiratorially as Maggie shows her the picture. Maggie looks closer now. Yes, she can see what her mother means. That unmistakable mischief in the eyes. But trouble?

"You look like fun to me," Maggie says.

And Leah throws her head back and laughs that same unrestrained, purely pleasured laugh. "I sure do, don't I?"

When she was seven, just barely seven and Cecil not quite yet five, Leah coaxed him under the bed in her parents' room one afternoon with the promise of a new game. She pulled out a sheer cornhusk—pliant, from the inside near the ear; and from her other pocket pulled a handful of brown, dried cornsilk. For awhile they lay there on their bellies, propped up on elbows, tearing the husk into pieces, filling each piece with silk, rolling, licking the edges in their favorite game of all, imitating the grown-ups. When they had a pile of their cigarettes in front of them, Cecil picked a fat one up and clenched it lightly between his teeth, turning to her, grinning, like he thought he sure was something. Leah took one, too, more delicately, between two fingers the way she watched her mother and Aunt Dessie do on the back porch of a late afternoon when all the chores were done and they believed they'd just rest a minute before beginning dinner.

This is how they passed the time, Leah and Cecil, with their pretend cigarettes, their pretend grown-up stories to play-act. On the porch, in the evenings, their parents and Ma and whatever aunts or cousins happened to be living there or just visiting, would rock and watch them and laugh. Cecil wore his Daddy's hat and swaggered down the long gallery. Leah pretended

Illustration by Randy Sanders.

to stir pots and turn chicken in a skillet. Iva gave her old spatulas and cracked cups and bowls to play with. It was Iva who decided when a cap of Gid's or a blouse of hers was out of style or too worn and should become another of her children's playthings. It was Gid himself who'd brought them husks and silk, showed them how to roll it tight. And the grown-ups watched them play until the night got good and dark and pulsed with the rhythm of crickets.

Cecil thinks this is what they are doing now—play-acting. They are going to pretend to smoke the cornhusks and maybe pretend to talk about the new depot being built on the other side of Main Street, or what they should have for dinner.

But Leah reaches in another pocket now, the one in her dress, underneath the apron, and pulls out a fistful of Bluefield matches. Cecil's wide slate eyes widen even more, and his jaw drops a little, spilling his corn reefer to the floor. Leah doesn't notice, focused as she is on the red match-head just inches from her face. Her fingers curled around the stick, she flicks and flicks and flicks her thumbnail against it (just like she's watched Gid do a thousand times) and wonders why it doesn't light. Instead she snaps the sulfur head neatly from the match and watches it fly across the waxed, wide pine floor, under her mother's dresser.

"Shitfire," she whispers and now Cecil's chin very nearly hits the floor so agog is he at this wicked wonder that seems to be his sister. Leah picks another match from the pile she has laid neatly between them and looks around their dusky, under-the-bed kingdom and studies. Her eyes light on the rough wood bar that holds the bed slats. She has to turn almost over on her back to get the right angle and then she swipes—once, twice and it catches.

Cecil can see the little flame dance and flicker in Leah's blue eyes as she puts the cigarette to her lips, the match to it, puckers up and makes a series of tiny, chuffing sounds. Her cheeks are red. She is not inhaling. Even so, the little reed begins to smolder, sends up a tiny wisp of smoke that curls and beckons ever so invitingly. She is grinning at him. Cecil grins back and takes his own cigarette now from where it's rolled across the floor, picks it up, holds it out to Leah.

She's a pro already. Manages to roll almost over again, this time with her lit cigarette in one hand, light the new match in one swipe, and roll back in one smooth motion. "You gotta puff it while I light it," she advises Cecil, in a voice that suggests she's been lighting up now for many years. He studies so hard as he puts it in his mouth, watching the flame come nearer, that his eyes nearly cross and she starts to giggle. This seems to make him mad so he puffs now all the harder and that is why, instead of the slow smolder and wisp of smoke like Leah's, his cigarette leaps into a yellow, flicking flame so high he feels it singe his eyebrow.

He yowls. He throws the cigarette up, away from him, and propels himself as fast as he can, using arms and feet like flippers, out from under the bed. Leah shimmies out, too, terrified that she has hurt her Cece, her baby brother. She grabs him from behind,

Cecil's wide slate eyes widen even more, and his jaw drops a little, spilling his corn reefer to the floor. Leah doesn't notice, focused as she is on the red match-head just inches from her face.

spins him around, and wails when she sees his left blond eyebrow, turned brownish black around the edges. She brushes at the crispy hairs, which break off in her hand and smell horrible, and then clutches her little brother to her chest. She whimpers now, more distressed than he, who is really not all that hurt and is more interested in this sudden display of love and attention.

Neither one of them, it seems, is paying a bit of notice to what is going on under the bed, where Cecil's still blazing brand, the pile of matches, the stack of silk-filled cornhusk cylinders have all met in a union that is swift and concentrated. The little mess of tinder burns out quick enough, but not before the flames lick the underside of the cotton ticking laid across the slats above, and it is the smoldering—acrid, evil—that at last gets their attention. And the attention of their mother and their aunt, doing laundry on the back porch.

Cecil's howl had been easy enough to ignore—or at least wait out to see if it would resolve itself—but the women rush back in the house at the first smell of smoke. They check the new gas stove quickly but see only the pot of bluing on the burner turned low at the back. They follow their noses then, through the parlor, across the entrance hall, to the bedroom at the front of the house. There they find Leah and Cecil, sobbing, arms around each other like little refugees, and behind them, the bed with gray whorls of smoke seeping out.

"Good Lord, sweet Jesus!" Iva cries and begins throwing quilts and coverlet off the bed to find just what is burning. Dessie pushes the children aside and grabs the feather mattress at the head of the bed, while Iva hauls from the bottom. They flip it over onto the floor and see no damage. But all of this fanning and stirring up the air has only increased the fire in the cotton tick that is the bed's bottom layer. Iva thinks she

can see the smoke rising up now from its center. She and Dessie move in practiced motions. They each grab a corner and tug in unison. The tick moves halfway off the springs, near enough so they can each grab a far corner. Now a corner in each hand, they fold the tick in half and see the spot that is seared and smoking, sparking now with flame.

Except for the smoke and flame, it looks just like they are taking up the tick for airing, for the annual spring cleaning, Leah thinks. Except for the smoke and the flame and the fact that they are moving maybe ten times faster. Except for all that and the screaming.

The screaming, she suddenly realizes, is directed at her. "Get the door! Get the door! Get! The! Door! Leah!"

Fast as lightning she is out of the bedroom, into the hall, tugging on the oval brass handle of the front door, twisting and pulling. She slams it hard back into the wall, praying that the old, beveled glass doesn't shatter as her mother has promised her it surely will if she slams that door just one more time. She knows she cannot accommodate the broken glass, not one more drop of horrible sin added to this bucket-load she has just acquired, which would, should she die tonight before a lifetime to make it up, drag her straight to hell in an instant.

Then she is on the porch, holding back the screen as the two women, puffing and coughing, haul the smoking mattress out in the yard, Cecil snuffling right behind them. They throw it, fire down, on the dirt path and this, more than the buckets of water they haul from the well and pour on it in the minutes that follow, extinguishes the fire.

"That tick was plumb ruined, as much from the smoke and water as the actual burning," Leah said. The house smelled like burnt cotton for days. And that night when her daddy got home, "He gave me a whipping. He used his Moroccan red leather belt, the only time I ever got spanked with a belt." Leah told this part with her blue eyes wide with wonder. Maggie wasn't even seven herself the first time she heard this story and the belt part just killed her. "Oh Mama," she said and put her arms around her mother's neck. "You didn't mean to do it. Nobody should have whipped you."

"Why, Maggie, I liked to have burnt down the house," Leah said. "Of course I should have been whipped. I could have burnt the house down and everybody in it."

It is only years later, as Maggie remembers with a cup of tea gone cold in the kitchen, the worn picture in her hand, Leah's breath punctuating swift and impatiently as she lies dying in the next room. It is only then that Maggie recognizes the pride that was in her mother's voice. ❖

Born in Corbin, Kentucky, Ronni Lundy has long chronicled the people of the hillbilly diaspora as a journalist and cookbook author. Her books include *Shuck Beans, Stack Cakes,* and *Honest Fried Chicken: The Heart and Soul of Southern Country Kitchens*. She is the former restaurant reviewer and music critic for the *Courier-Journal* in Louisville, Kentucky.

HIGH LIFE AT THE BEER WASH

James Watson

It's hard to ignore a place called the Beer Wash. The name—plastered in giant red letters on the end of a long, rectangular building alongside U.S. Highway 19E in Roan Mountain, Tennessee—leaves all but the least inquisitive asking for the story.

"Right there. That's where the sprayer used to hang," said Forrest Whitener, pointing to a metal pipe hanging on the wall behind him as he manned the bar. Motioning to some bricks in the wall behind a row of small wooden chairs, he added, "And that block there is where you used to put your change."

The Beer Wash was once a four-stall car wash, complete with a change machine and wax cycle. But when a neighboring restaurant owner saw his efforts to sell beer foiled by a homeowner who contested the distance between the restaurant and his house, the restaurateur saw a solution just outside his front door. The car wash sitting on the edge of his parking lot was just the right number of feet away from the homeowner to comply with the local ordinance on alcohol sales. So the restaurant owner bought the car wash, boarded up the walls of one stall, put in some coolers, and was in business. That was nearly a decade ago. STOP

Then, in 2008, Jane Whitener along with her son, Forrest, and family member Linda LaFrance, purchased the Beer Wash with an eye to make it something more. Originally from Illinois, the Whiteners and LaFrance had been living in North Carolina since 2000. When economic collapse threatened the nation a couple of years ago, the trio decided to pull their finances from the stock market and invest in something more concrete.

"My son came home and said, 'Mom, we ought to buy a bar,'" said the elder Whitener. "I'd never even been a person who frequented bars, really."

The original owner had at first just boarded up the one stall, allowing the other three to continue to be used for washing cars. He eventually walled in the remaining stalls while punching doorways in the concrete separating them, but never went further than having the coolers and a drive-through on the edge of the building to sell mainstream beers. The new owners

Forrest Whitener shows some of the large selection of beers available at the Beer Wash. Photo courtesy James Watson.

saw potential in adding a bit more character and selection to the establishment, while creating a motto:

The Coolest Drive-Thru Beer Joint in the Mountains.

"I knew we could do this better, starting with selling better beers," Forrest said, adding they also created a lounge and pool hall in the back stalls.

Roan Mountain is a tourist destination in Southern Appalachia, with a popular state park nearby and some of the most beautiful natural surroundings in the country. The Beer Wash is just down the road from an Appalachian Trail drop-off point.

The place doesn't feel claustrophobic despite the fact that a person sitting at the bar can hand drinks to a customer against the back wall without leaving his stool. And with such a unique name in such an unexpected place, it's no surprise that the regulars seem professionally cast for their roles. An elderly man with a long, gray beard relays tales of moonshining and holds up a cane to announce himself the establishment's bouncer. Others engage in conversations on who is the best bluegrass musician still alive, with the title eventually given to a recent performer in the tiny place.

"The best bluegrass session you ever heard in your life was right here," proclaims Mike Johnson, a retired Marine Corps officer who moved to Roan Mountain recently. "This is, by far, the best bar in five counties."

With a bar this size, everyone shares in the same conversation. No one is a stranger for more than seconds after entering. There are no corners to hide in when the entire building is little more than a corner itself.

"This is a place where everyone can come and be with friends," said Linda. "It feels like home."

And then there are the stickers along the walls: "Beer will save the world," "Forgive," "Beer is love," "Question," and "The banjo is mightier than the sword."

"We all look out for each other," Jane said. "It's been a tough time here. People can't find work. The winter's been tough. This is a place people can come and be with friends."

James Watson is corporate director of public relations for Mountain States Health Alliance in Johnson City, Tennessee.

The interior of the Beer Wash—small, but not claustrophobic. Photo courtesy James Watson.

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT SHINE

Dana Wildsmith

As clear as water from my well, but not
as clear as alcohol—as strange as that
may sound—for this is living liquid: a shot
of aqua vitae with its specks and motes
of vegetative matter and a dash
of death potential (as always is the case
with life) or at the least a gamble at
a loss of sight or sense or steady use
of legs and hands, my hands that took the jar
as if no harm could come to me—to you,
but not to me—because I would be scared
of even water from my well if too
much thought preceded drinking, and I
have found this also is the case with life.

Dana Wildsmith is the author of four collections of poetry and a memoir, *Back to Abnormal: Surviving with an Old Farm in the New South*. She lives in Bethlehem, Georgia.

ACROPHOBICS WELCOME

Sarah Anne Loudin Thomas

The Gallup Poll periodically checks to see what Americans' top ten fears are, and while the order fluctuates slightly, fear of heights always finishes near the top of the list, along with snakes and speaking in public. The majority of Americans, it is clear, would rather not, say, jump off the third highest bridge in the United States.

But then there are people like Benjy Simpson and Jason Bell. Both men specialize in helping people leave the relative safety of the New River Gorge Bridge near Fayetteville, West Virginia, to fall, descend, or fly through a whole lot of wide-open space. Simpson, owner of Passages to Adventure, was invited to serve as Bridge Day Rappel Coordinator in 1991, and he's been facilitating descents through thin air ever since. Bell, owner of Vertical Visions, has headed up the B.A.S.E. jumping side of Bridge Day since 2003.

Simpson and Bell play key roles in the annual Bridge Day event, held in October, when the 876-foot high New River Gorge Bridge is closed to traffic and opened to pedestrians along with B.A.S.E. jumpers, rappelling teams, and high-line riders.

"Bridge Day to me is very special," says Simpson. "I'm amazed that they built this structure to begin with."

And Simpson knows the structure well. Not only does he spend quite a bit of time in the framework beneath the roadway anchoring ropes for teams to rappel down each year, he's now operating a business offering guided catwalk tours year-round. Opened in the spring of 2010, Bridge Walk offers adventurers of all ages and experience levels the chance to walk the entire length of the 3,030-foot bridge with just a 24-inch-wide steel walkway between them and the oldest river in America more than 850 feet below.

Simpson points out that an extensive safety system makes it impossible to fall. And, he adds, "People say they're afraid of heights, but they've just learned to be afraid. This is a good way to get over that."

In addition to coordinating rappelling teams, Simpson helps set up the high line—a sort of zip line that runs 600 feet and drops 250 to the Fayette Station Road in the side of the gorge. And just like the catwalk, no training is required for this adrenaline rush. Riders can go solo or in tandem, and members of Simpson's Bridge Day team control the speed of descent.

But for Simpson, the real deal is that rappel from the bridge to the riverside down below. Rappelling involves a controlled descent down a fixed object on a rope. Up to twenty-five teams that include around 300 people sign up to rappel each year. In June there's a lottery to determine who gets to rappel and from what point on the bridge. The prized spots are those closest

Three generations of rappellers begin their descent: Bob Handly, his son, Todd, and his granddaughter, Megan. Photo courtesy Benjy Simpson.

to the center of the span where the drop is the longest.

Rappellers come from all across the U.S., and there are typically a few Canadian teams as well. Team members have been as young as eighteen and as old as eighty-two, and almost as many are women as men. Rappellers must be experienced and submit their qualifications before being placed in the lottery. Then it's up to Simpson to coordinate who gets to climb over the rail when and where on Bridge Day. "I've become the troll under the bridge," he says.

And Simpson understands why hundreds of people are eager to dangle hundreds of feet in the air by a relatively thin rope because he's done it himself. At first, he said, you're within the bridge structure and have the sense of something being around you. But then, "Once you leave the arches, it's you and God on that half-inch rope."

There's no safety line, no backup, just a rope and a whole lot of open air. "You have to get over that initial, 'Golly what happens if this rope should break,'" Simpson says. "It's a humbling experience in that you get out there and you're just very small."

Descents can take up to fifteen minutes or more, depending on whether rappellers are enjoying the view or the wind in their hair on the way down. Simpson remembers taking his time on his first descent. "The first time I went off I was just stopping to look because it was so gorgeous."

But one thing Simpson hasn't done is a B.A.S.E. jump from the bridge. That's where Bell and his team come in. B.A.S.E. stands for "Building, Antenna, Span, and Earth"—the four types of fixed objects from which jumpers leap, with parachutes designed for rapid deployment. This type of jump requires much experience.

"Every year, I get ten to fifteen phone calls from people who want to B.A.S.E. jump at Bridge Day and they have no parachuting experience," said Bell. "I always tell them that ski jumpers must learn to ski before they can go off the jump. It's exactly the same with B.A.S.E. jumping, where extensive skydiving experience is a prerequisite."

Bell explains that there are quite a few requirements for jumpers: completing at least 100 jumps (skydiving or B.A.S.E.) prior to Bridge Day; having successfully jumped at least once in the two years prior to Bridge Day; and completing one of several approved B.A.S.E. jumping courses.

Then there are more basic requirements like being at least eighteen years old; having the proper equipment and ID; registering ahead of time; and generally behaving well—"No loud cussing" is mentioned specifically.

Jumpers have been parachuting off the New River Gorge Bridge since 1979—just two years after it opened to the public. Registrants can make as many jumps as they can squeeze in during the day. In 2009, approximately 450 jumpers made more than 800 jumps in a six-hour window.

Bell got hooked on skydiving in 1992 when he was a student at West Virginia University. A year later, after about 150 skydives, he stood on the railing of the New River Gorge Bridge and took the plunge. In 2002 he was invited to assist with the organization of Bridge Day since he was a B.A.S.E. jumper and a resident of nearby Bridgeport.

His company took over as the Bridge Day B.A.S.E. jumping coordinator in 2003. Bell estimates that he spends 700 hours each year on Bridge Day while maintaining a normal forty-hour work week as a mechanical engineer for a military contractor.

Why does he work so hard? "In a nutshell, I enjoy seeing a good plan come together," says the husband and father of two. And why does he jump himself? "I B.A.S.E. jump because I want to fly like a bird and experience feelings that 99.999 percent of the population can only dream of."

Of course, the issue of safety always comes up when talking about jumping off anything nearly 900 feet in the air. And B.A.S.E. jumping is undeniably dangerous, but Bell says that's true of many sports.

"B.A.S.E. jumping is like any other sport with yearly injuries and fatalities. Skiers run into trees, hunters shoot each other, and countless ATV riders are killed every year," he says. But Bell feels that B.A.S.E. jumping fatalities get more attention because they're so dramatic. According to the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* there have been four fatalities since jumping began—the first in 1983, one in 1986 (not during Bridge Day), one in 1987, and then a death in 2006 after a nearly twenty-year lull.

When asked what draws jumpers to the New River Gorge, Bell said it's not only one of the most beautiful areas in the world to make a B.A.S.E. jump, but it's also one of the safest. Jumpers are trained ahead of time, Vertical Visions staff checks equipment, boats are available for water rescues, and paramedics are on hand at all times.

And as for all those acrophobics out there, Bell just doesn't get it: "I'm not sure why people are afraid of heights, but I'd like to have a nickel for every person who confessed this particular fear to me. A rational person should really be afraid of ground impact rather than the simple act of standing on top of a tall structure."

Like Simpson, Bell thinks a fear of heights is curable: "I'd be comfortable in saying that I could probably convert the most strident acrophobic into an adrenaline-craving adventurer in less than a year. It's all in their minds." ❖

A native of French Creek, West Virginia, Sarah Thomas now lives in Asheville, North Carolina. She is the director of development and public relations for the Presbyterian Home for Children in Black Mountain.

IN AUTUMN I DREAM OF FALLING

Ron Houchin

It gives me a peculiar sense of hope,
like buying parachutes and cutting
the silk into pajamas.
I jump out of awareness into sleep.

I see leaves scalloping the sky,
their arms wide for the dive
they've been readying for since
the first of spring.

My eyes are happy in the light
and color of falling.
I know winter dusk is coming
on some level not just chromatic.

I see Spanish fans, red and black,
little white worms eating at their edges.
Moths and midges lie in debris.
I rise on earth, leaf, and wings of dust.

A retired public school teacher, Ron Houchin has published five books of poetry, and his work has appeared in over a hundred journals.

HIGH ON THE ALABAMA HOG

Fred Sauceman

"And on the eighth day . . . Well, You Know!" reads a black-and-white bumper sticker from Dreamland Bar-B-Que. The age-old art and science of slow-cooking meat, barbecue, is worshipped in the state of Alabama, from pecan-infused pork shoulder at Mobile's Brick Pit near the coast to white sauce-soaked chicken on the banks of the Tennessee River in the north central section of the state.

Alabama joins Arkansas, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee in the Southern barbecue belt, a string of states whose styles of barbecue have influenced one another over the years. Birmingham is not always mentioned in a litany of America's barbecue meccas—Memphis, Kansas City, and Lexington, North Carolina, for example—but it was in and around Alabama's largest city where the Southern Foodways Alliance, headquartered at the University of Mississippi, chose to begin its "BBQ Trail," a collection of oral histories profiling the South's most storied barbecue establishments.

Amy Evans, oral historian for the alliance, describes Alabama as a "sponge, good at embracing other barbecue traditions." Alabama lies between the barbecue poles of Memphis and the Carolinas. Vinegar-based sauces akin to North Carolina varieties are found in northern Alabama, along with many variations of tomato-based sauces all over the state. Those sauces bear a kinship to those served in the barbecue houses of Memphis as well as across the state in eastern Tennessee.

South of Birmingham, vinegary sauces become scarce, while in eastern Alabama, mustard, a South Carolina influence, finds its way into spicy sauces, often in combination with tomato products.

An emblem of Alabama barbecue is a white sauce created by Robert "Big Bob" Gibson at his Decatur restaurant in1925. Originally, cooks dunked chickens in the sauce. Employees joked that Big Bob's chickens were baptized in it. Gibson gave away the recipe freely. It has been widely published in cookbooks and circulated on the Internet. Its dominant ingredients are mayonnaise, apple cider vinegar, lemon juice, black pepper, and salt.

The restaurant still operates today, run by Gibson's grandson Don McLemore and his son-in-law Chris Lilly. The sauce has evolved from a kitchen staple to a table condiment, and its use has expanded beyond chicken. Diners often bathe Big Bob Gibson's award-

Big Bob Gibson caters a Monsanto company picnic in Decatur, Alabama, 1956. Photo courtesy Chris Lilly.

winning pork shoulder in it as well, meat described by food critic Jeffrey Steingarten as among the "pinnacle of barbecue."

When *Southern Living* magazine created its barbecue map of the South in 1982, there was no acknowledgement of the white sauce, but by 2003, when the map was revised and reissued in *Southern Living Bar-B-Que: Our Ultimate Guide,* a large white bottle appeared over northern Alabama. Because of their many competition victories and television appearances, McLemore and Lilly have been described as "the rock stars of Alabama barbecue," and Big Bob's has now franchised into barbecue-crazed North Carolina. Gibson's is representative of the respect for tradition engendered by Alabama barbecue. It has been in the same family since 1925.

Although pipe-smoking patriarch John Bishop died in 1997, his family has not only kept his original Tuscaloosa DreamLand Bar-B-Que alive, but the restaurant has now expanded into other Alabama cities such as Birmingham, Northport, Huntsville, and Mobile, and even out of state into Georgia. Bishop presided over the pit in a redwood chair, and his early menu consisted of nothing more than ribs, white bread, chips, and drinks. A rib sandwich was three ribs atop commercial loaf bread. The sauce was, and still is, redolent of vinegar but with a tomato underpinning. Diners note the balance between the sour sauce and sweet iced tea, an accompaniment to barbecue throughout Alabama.

In the steel mill town of Bessemer, the Sykes family has been in the food business since 1956, first serving hamburgers, then converting to barbecue, still smoked in a pit inside the front door of the restaurant. Van Sykes, son of the original owner and current proprietor of Bob Sykes BarB-Q, summarized the philosophy of many Alabama barbecue pitmasters who are often asked for the "secret" of good barbecue. "Not many people appreciate the dynamic of just salt, meat, and fire—that's it," Sykes told the Southern Foodways Alliance for its "BBQ Trail" website. "It's time-honored. Its genius is its simplicity."

Always respectful of tradition, Sykes once warned his employees that if a gas line were ever installed to replace the use of green hickory wood, he would "come back and haunt you." Sykes' sandwiches, like many across the state, can be stuffed with inside meat, the crust from the charred outside, or, as many diners prefer, a combination of the two.

Although not in the same family for the entire period, Irondale's Golden Rule is one of the state's oldest restaurants. It opened in 1891, a popular stop for barbecue and beer on Highway 78, the road to Atlanta. The Williams family started the business, and in the 1930s, electrician Jabo Stone married Ellene Williams. They ran the restaurant until 1969, when it was purchased by Michael Matsos, who had operated La Paree Restaurant and Michael's Sirloin Room in downtown Birmingham. The restaurant thus joined Pete's Famous Hot Dogs and Gus's Hot Dogs as part of Birmingham's Greek-owned restaurant community. Golden Rule's barbecue is started in a smoker that holds 600 pounds of meat at a time and then finished on a pit. The restaurant offers several styles of sauce that Matsos says have evolved as the franchise has grown throughout the South.

Demetri's BBQ in Birmingham is likewise Greek-owned. Sam Nakos carries on his father Demetri's legacy in hiring only Greeks to work as pitmasters, on an open pit. The restaurant is also known for its fried pies.

Food historian John T. Edge has written, "In the South, barbecue is a civic religion. And a smoke-lacquered pig is a totem of shared faith." At Chuck's Bar-B-Q in the former mill town of Opelika, the connection between barbecue and religion is most clear. Employees wear T-shirts with "Jesus, The Bread of Life" printed on the back, and beside the cash register, owner Chuck Ferrell's religious handouts proclaim "Something Better Than Barbecue."

Chuck's has been serving chopped pork butts since 1976, and the restaurant has popularized mustard-based barbecue sauce in that section of eastern Alabama. Over oak, hickory, and sometimes pecan wood, Ferrell smokes CT butt, a Boston butt with fat and bone removed. Sliced and chopped are serving options, as well as "chipped on the block," a finer cut and the owner's personal preference.

Ron Harwell, a contest representative with the Kansas City Barbeque Society and a resident of Decatur, Alabama, notes the prevalence of slaw as a topping for barbecue sandwiches in Alabama, while Amy Evans points to dill pickles as a defining condiment, at places like the Green Top in Dora, open since 1951,

Alabama barbecue is often a roadside enterprise, as seen here, near Tuskegee. Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

where there is an assembly line of buns, barbecued pork shoulder, sauce, and a Tupperware bucket of pickles.

Alabama barbecuers like Dale Petit at the Top Hat in Blount Springs view the tending of the pits as a craft, not as a job, says Evans. Petit arises at 4:30 a.m. to cut wood and make sauce.

Alabama barbecuers have come into the business through varied and circuitous routes. Chuck Ferrell once repaired looms. Leo Headrick, who opened the Green Top with his wife Susie, once mined coal. Rudolph McCollum, founder of Winfield's The Sparerib, spent thirty-two years as a schoolteacher in Fayette. The Boar's Butt in Winfield began as a barbecue stand operated by the local high school football coach. Gerald Atchison, owner of Sho'nuff BBQ in Alexander City, sold live bait before converting to barbecue. Bob Sykes sold bread.

They are representative of a legion of Alabama barbecue cooks who are committed to keeping a Southern tradition alive, despite modern-day pressures to take shortcuts. Among all the variations in cooking techniques, sauce ingredients, and side dishes, persistence and patience are their common characteristics.

Pride in their craft is evident, too, and chauvinistic slogans show it. A sign at Mobile's Brick Pit proclaims, "Welcome to the Best Damn Smoked Bar-B-Que in the Great State of Alabama," and crimson red signatures on the restaurant's walls echo the theme as diners create odes to the thirty-hour-smoldered meat. Of Dreamland's ribs, the restaurant's advertising asserts, "Ain't Nothing Like 'em Nowhere."

Alabama poet Jake Adam York, in "To the Unconverted," observes "the joints rise through smoke and glow like roadhouses on Heaven's way."

Among all the variations in cooking techniques, sauce ingredients, and side dishes, persistence and patience are their common characteristics.

"Beef or pork, catfish, quail or armadillo, we've tried it all, loved it with brushes, kiss of vinegar, tongue of flame . . . ."

In Alabama, barbecue is ecumenical. It is both urban and rural, black and white, tomato-sweet and vinegar-sour, pulled and chopped. It is cinder-block simple and strip-mall slick. A product of the working class culture of the mills and factories, integrating all, it is one of the state's most unifying and enduring symbols.

Fred Sauceman is the editor of *Cornbread Nation 5: The Best of Southern Food Writing*, published in 2010 by the University of Georgia Press.

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A DESCENT FROM THE BEANSTALK?

Bill Best

It had been a long time since Jack was the victor in one of his never-ending battles with the Giant. But while beaten, the Giant had not been resting; he had been plotting his return and a decisive victory.

Actually, through modern technology, the Giant has been cloned into three: San Monto, Agra Con, and Gill Car, the "Big Three."

After his first defeat of the Giant, Jack never thought he would let his guard down, but he had become over-confident and had taken to eating foods containing generous amounts of high fructose corn syrup.

One day, after a hefty meal of French fries, corn chips, and a soft drink, he decided to go down to the trading post and see if he could trade a bushel sack of his beans for some really sweet foods. He knew these foods were increasing in number almost every day, and he thought it was time to polish up his sweet tooth.

His bean collection was vast and included those saved by his mother, his two grandmothers, his four great-grandmothers, and many other kinfolk and community people going all the way back to the time when Native Americans had shared their bean seeds with the new arrivals to this country.

He placed at least 500 varieties in his sack, each within a sealed container, and left the confines of his mother's small farm. As the dirt road he was walking on met pavement, he spotted the Big Three in an open limousine. These Giants were even bigger than the one he had defeated so handily a few years back.

Seeing Jack with the sack of beans on his back, San Monto called out to him, "Hey there, Jack! Looks like you got a heavy load on your back." Agra Con then yelled, "Come on over and talk with us, son. Let us see what you have in that sack." Chiming in, Gill Car said, " Let us give you a lift down to the Trading Post in our new limousine; we might even want to do some trading with you ourselves."

But Jack was cautious. Deep down he knew that Giants had a lot of tricks up their sleeves and were not to be trusted. Still he thought if he could out-fox one Giant one time, he might be able to do the same thing with three. So he hopped into the backseat of the limousine but held on carefully to his sack of beans.

Suddenly Jack noticed that a Supreme Court justice was moonlighting as the Giants' chauffeur. He had become aware that some members of the Supreme Court seemed to be getting a little political by letting giants spend a lot of money in political races, but it

Illustration by Randy Sanders.

didn't bother him much, so long as the justice was a good driver and didn't run off the road.

San Monto, the most gigantic of the giants, was the first to speak. He congratulated Jack on his good bean crops and asked if he might trade Jack some sweet foods for his stock of beans: "I'll give you all the sweets you might ever want if you will trade me all the beans in your sack."

Jack decided that a bellyful of sweets would not be a fair trade. But then San Monto said, "When you grow these beans, Jack, you have to tend them and keep the weeds out. I'll trade you some beans that are resistant to chemicals. You can just spray them and the weeds won't bother you none. You won't have to hoe your beans and you can go fishing instead."

Then San Monto added, "Why, you know it would be hard to keep up with all these beans, so I think it might be best if we got rid of all of them except three or four varieties. With our technology and our knowledge of genetics, we could feed beans to all peoples of the earth with only two or three varieties. We could borrow a few genes from Brazil nuts or flounder in order to make better beans."

Jack was all for everybody being able to eat, but the many varieties of beans existing on earth must have been here for a reason, he thought. Since beans were such a good food already, why would anyone need to borrow genes from other life forms?

"Don't you know, Jack, that we can make beans with no runners at all? asked San Monto. "All our new bean varieties are designed to be short and hold their beans high so they can be harvested by machine. They are also tough as nails, and you can sharpen your teeth when you eat them, if you can eat them at all. But best of all, you pick them before the seeds appear, when the beans are smooth and straight. You can let them grow a little more, and they can be used as shoe leather. And you can sharpen them into toothpicks."

But Jack liked large, plump seeds in his bean hulls, and he knew the seeds contained the protein. He liked vining beans so tall he had to use a stepladder to pick them.

Gill Car and Agra Con studied Jack's face as he wrestled with the idea of giving up his bean collection for sweets. They knew the Giants of the world would have more money, power, and influence if they could get rid of all those tender, protein-rich beans Jack and his kin had always grown.

Gill Car spoke: "Jack, just think of all the good that could come from a smaller number of varieties grown by a smaller number of larger farms throughout the world. That could lead to fewer farmers being necessary to work the soil, still larger machines to make harvesting more efficient, and fewer people needed to provide food for the peoples of the earth. That would free up still more people to leave the land and find jobs in cities. After all, most people are in need of becoming citified anyhow since humans, by instinct, are basically herd animals."

Then it was Agra Con's turn: "Jack, just think of all the benefits of transferring genes from one food plant to another to make all plants of a species the same size, to improve the yield of each plant, and to make each fruit and vegetable suitable to be shipped at least 3,000 miles and have a minimum shelf life of thirty-five days. Then everyone could shop at megamarkets and never have to worry about finding anything at farmers' markets. People could also stop worrying about growing their own gardens and spend more time watching TV and eating more sweet foods."

Seeing Jack was still having doubts, San Monto changed his tactics: "We have developed soybeans in which we can turn the genes on and off. They are called terminator genes, and the beans won't sprout and grow unless we tell them to. And keep in mind that we are not only patenting life forms, but we may begin to patent natural resources also. Just think, we may patent water and you might have to pay us for water to drink and take a bath. We are already patenting the pollen in the air, and we might even patent the air itself. Then you would even have to pay us for breathing. And now you get some idea of why we hired a judge as a chauffeur."

Since Jack still wasn't responding, San Monto said plaintively, "For God's sake, Jack, don't stand in the way of progress!"

The mean genes already implanted in the beans of the giants were troubling enough, but to trade his beans to giants who would destroy them was more than Jack could stand. He decided to refuse the deal, but first he had to plot an escape strategy.

As Jack and the three Giants came within a mile of the trading post, Jack was getting desperate to find a place to jump out of the limousine with his beans and escape before the giants stole them. He remembered the boat he kept under a bridge, and since the creek was up, he thought it might be a good way to escape.

"How about stopping this limousine next to the bridge?" Jack asked. "I need to sit near running water to help me make a good decision about giving up my beans in a trade."

Jack hopped out with his sack of beans on his shoulder and slid down the bank into his boat. He floated downstream feeling good that he had defeated not one giant but three. He called back to them as they watched from the bridge: "You'll have to find another way to control the world's food supply. I'm keeping my beans and will see to it that they're spread far and wide." ❖

Bill Best is professor emeritus of physical education at Berea College in Kentucky and director of the Sustainable Mountain Agriculture Center.

CITY SLICKERS

Margaret M. Nava

The year was 1978. My future husband and I were huddled around a Smoky Mountain campfire, drinking twenty-five-year-old Armenian brandy and smoking . . . well, let's just say what we were smoking couldn't be purchased from the local tobacco shop. As the night wore on and the stars sparkled ever more brightly, we began brainstorming about what each of us might do with the rest of our lives. Richard said he wanted to start a business—"Any kind, as long as it's profitable." I said I wanted a career that brought me close to the earth, maybe as a forest ranger or a landscaper. We weighed the merits and pitfalls of each idea, discarded most of them, and drank more brandy. Then I asked Richard, "Have you ever thought about farming?" It was as if a giant light bulb went off in his head. "That's it. Let's buy a farm and live off the land."

Even though we were both from Chicago and knew nothing whatsoever about farming, I jumped at the suggestion. "We could make our own clothes, use wood for heating and lighting, raise some chickens, and grow all sorts of healthy vegetables." Little did I know where that statement would lead.

Over the next three months, we mailed letters to real estate agents all over southern Appalachia, our favorite region. We said we were looking for a small farm, about a hundred acres, with fencing and cross fencing, a serviceable barn, and a nice house. And we didn't want to pay more than $30,000.

Most of the replies were along the lines of, "If you find it, let us know." Then the letter we were hoping for arrived. It was from an agent in West Virginia saying she had a property we might be interested in. It was "two-hundred and forty-eight private acres located along the banks of the Pocatalico River near a place called Stringtown."

The house was a little run down, "nothing that can't be fixed," declared Richard, but the surrounding countryside was wonderful. There were fish in the river, huge flocks of birds, more deer than I'd ever seen in one place, and mile after mile of peace and quiet. We signed the papers.

After an impromptu wedding, we packed our belongings and moved to the farm. During our first month, October, we kept busy with unpacking and getting organized, but by the time the first snow fell, we discovered there was nothing to do. I'd heard the term "cabin fever" before but never understood its true meaning. The four walls of our "fixable" farmhouse closed in around us, and we quickly became claustrophobic. After several agonizing weeks of boredom, restlessness, and irritability, we turned to the neighbors.

Author's house near Stringtown. Photo courtesy Margaret Nava.

Richard made friends with a local oil well pumper, and I got to know a woman who collected seed catalogs. She had them all—Burpee, Stark Bros., Landreth, Park Seed, and Johnny's. She educated me about determinate and indeterminate tomatoes, bush and pole beans, sugar baby watermelons and pattypan squash. "Nothing," she said, "wards off cabin fever like a stack of seed catalogs." Before the first thaw, I had created a list of tasty potentials, sent away for seeds, and bought every gardening tool I could lay my hands on at the local co-op.

When spring finally arrived, Richard borrowed his pumper friend's tractor and tilled two acres of bottomland for my garden. The pumper suggested choosing higher ground for the garden, but Richard argued, saying the soil near the river would be fertile and rocky enough to provide good drainage.

Eager to get started, I planted four rows of lettuce, six of tomatoes, an untold number of corn and bean rows, and a full acre of potatoes. My friend warned me that I was planting too much, but I assured her I'd make good use of everything.

Almost overnight, the seeds sent tender shoots exploding through the soil like tiny missiles. Some had delicate-looking leaves, others vestiges of their seedpods. My garden, the one I planted with my own two hands, was growing. I was thrilled.

By the end of the first week, I started to notice that some plants were disappearing. "Well, that's okay," I thought. "There's more than enough for everybody."

One or two missing plants eventually turned into entire rows. Something was obviously eating my lettuce, corn, and tomatoes.

I told my catalog friend about my problem, and she said, "It's probably 'coons. They go down to the river at night to douse their food, and they must have decided your sprouts were easier to come by than nuts."

"What do I do to get rid of them?" I asked.

"Go to the beauty shop in town and ask if you can have the hair they sweep up off the floor."

I must have looked skeptical because she laughed and said, "Really. If you put hair around your plants, the 'coons will think a human is around and they'll run away."

Not ready to believe her, I checked with a couple of other neighbors who all concurred. One even added, "If that doesn't work, try pepper juice."

Deciding it was better to err on the side of caution, I ran a little test. I cleaned the hair from all my brushes and placed it around some of the plants. Then I mixed up a batch of pepper juice and sprayed it on others. The rest of the plants I left unprotected. If the raccoons stayed away from the hair- and pepper-shielded plants, I'd know my neighbors were right. If the furry little beasts ate all the plants, I'd know they weren't. But before the test could run its course, the worst thing imaginable happened. It rained.

The rain came down hard and heavy for two straight days. I was so busy emptying rain buckets in our "fixable" house that I never had time to think about the garden. When the sun reappeared, I walked down to the river. My garden, it seemed, was gone.

Richard's friend had been right. We should have picked a higher spot for the garden. The bottomland was fertile because rain washed all the fertilizer from uphill gardens into the river. But when the river overflowed its banks, all the plants washed away. Except . . . the potatoes. Evidently, all the rocks and silt carried down the river buried the aggressive-rooting plants, and the additional water nourished their numerous, albeit knobby, tubers.

Anyone who has ever planted potatoes knows that harvesting with a potato fork is hard work. You have to dig down in such a way as to loosen the soil and then pull the plants up by their stems, tubers and all. Before I finished one row, my hands were blistered and my back ached. My catalog friend was right. I had planted way too much. In desperation, I called all the neighbors. Some came with tractors, others with shovels. A week later, all the potatoes were harvested and everyone's root cellar was full.

When Richard and I moved to our farm, we were wet-behind-the-ears city slickers who thought they could just plant some seeds, stand back, watch their crops grow, and reap a bountiful harvest. We never considered what, or how much, we were going to plant, where we were going to plant it, how to keep critters away, or what to do with a bumper crop. Heck, what did we know about farming? We'd always gotten our lettuce and tomatoes already washed and neatly wrapped in cellophane from glitzy supermarkets or an occasional farmers market. Luckily, we had neighbors who knew what to do and were willing to help us out. In the years when we lived in West Virginia, our neighbors taught us how to raise chickens, bale hay, build a fence, repair a tractor, rotate crops, and plant by the signs. But the most important thing they taught us was how to take advice. Thank God for country folk. ❖

Margaret M. Nava, a retired West Virginia goat farmer, now lives and writes in New Mexico.

TRAIL

Darnell Arnoult

Buba is often mistaken
for a draft horse,
his fanny broad as
the washerwoman's
at the end of Yellow Jacket
Cove. I trail his chestnut
rump up one sharp steep
after another. He sways
and springs forward and up
slow, as if he totes
a heavy load of wet sheets
and towels. Watch him walk
with steady step. See him push
his sleek barreled
body on fragile toothpick
legs and steel shoes
slapping dirt and rock
toward top
steady as a wringer washer
slapping time against water,
its own momentum
getting the job done.

Darnell Arnoult is the award-winning author of *What Travels with Us: Poems* and the novel *Sufficient Grace*.

AFFINITY

Jim Minick

From *The Blueberry Years: A Memoir of Farm and Family* (Thomas Dunne, 2010)

We expect winged visitors to our field, and the manuals warn to be ready, to take action since blueberries are "bite-size for a bird." The thick books even illustrate how to set up a huge, eight-foot high net over the whole acre field, with massive, anchored posts and even more massive costs.

And I remember my grandfather who spent evenings waiting in his berry patch, rifle across his lap. Confined by emphysema to his garden tractor, he rode out after supper and picked off robins and starlings before dusk. He handed me his other rifle and together we tried to kill any settling, berry-hungry bird. But they kept returning, always honing in on the most loaded bush at the opposite end of the patch.

To be honest, the feathered creatures never really raid our Virginia field, never come in great numbers like the books warn or like they did on that Pennsylvania patch. I even hang two bluebird houses and have a resident family. When I take a break at the picnic table, I watch these "sky-colored" birds dart among the bushes, and yes, round berries fill their mouths, but also I witness them hunting the green plants for bugs, and it seems they eat more insects than blueberries.

One family of pickers tells us of another patch where they picked blueberries last year. There the farmer uses a cannon to scare away birds. "It would BOOM and BOOM and BOOM!" the ten-year-old son shouts and waves his arms with each BOOM. The father explains how it exploded at random times, so you never knew when to expect it. "I felt on edge the whole time," he remembers. And then the mother adds, "We really appreciate the peace and quiet of your field." No plans for cannons here, I think to myself, and then realize this family won't ever return to the boom-deafening patch.

Since we know of this affinity of berry and bird, and since I was a good Boy Scout, always doing my best to be prepared, we decide to take some preventive action. We buy bird-eye scare balloons, round yellow affairs that, once blown up, their red and black circles supposedly look like a hawk's eye swooping in for the kill. One morning in the berry hut, we sit in our wooden folding chairs bought at a church yard sale and begin to blow up these new-plastic, awful-smelling balloons. Sarah, ever the competitor, says, "I bet you a backrub I can blow this up faster than you."

Of course, I can't back down. "You're on." Before I even finish the words, her cheeks puff and

Jim and Sarah Minick with their morning's harvest of blueberries. Photo courtesy Jim Minick.

her balloon begins to inflate. I take a deep breath, put lips to foul-tasting balloon, and blow hard. But little happens. And Sarah's is already half filled, the bird eye already looking scary. I blow more and more and only get a slight swell, a little expansion. Soon I start

to feel light-headed, my lips numb, and I let go of the balloon's pinched neck, the precious air whizzing out. "Shit, Sarah. I can't do this without hyperventilating." I throw my sagging balloon at her as she ties off her fully inflated one.

"Guess I get a backrub," she gloats and grabs another.

"Yeah, yeah," I poke her in the ribs as she starts blowing her second balloon. She pinches the air and pokes me back as I head out the door. I figure I can at least work on our other bird-scare device, flashy reflective tape, inch-wide strips of heavy foil that catch the sun and stir up a whirring racket in the wind. These I unroll, cut to length, and string above the berry plants. I like how both balloons and tape are simple tools, no electricity, no batteries, just a little current of air and shine of sun to scare off feathered marauders.

But the manuals warn that birds, like deer and humans, quickly adapt, readily learn that the bug-eyed balloon is harmless. The trick is unpredictability, to move the tape and balloons often, to set the cannon, if used, to fire at random intervals.

These random acts of unkindness we accomplish with bamboo and leftover pipe. We harvest the bamboo from Sarah's folks' home in Charlotte where a skinny jungle of thirty-foot tall sticks has taken over their backyard. We tape and tie our ten-foot long haul to the side of the car, forcing the passenger (Sarah) to ride with her window down so she can hold onto these wind-wiggling rods for 150 miles. Luckily, the load doesn't get smashed on the highway.

In the field, I pound leftover chunks of irrigation pipe into the berry beds at twenty-foot intervals. The bamboo poles go into the pipes, and we stretch the reflective tape above the blueberries and tie it off on the poles. Each big-eyed, Sarah-blown balloon also gets its own bamboo rod where it dangles and bounces with the breeze. Once a week Sarah and I march across the field, moving the bamboo to different pipes, and hopefully creating a random effect. But who really knows if it fools the birds.

It does fool one picker. He picks all through the windy morning under the whistling foil. The racket impresses him, and he pauses often to try to figure out how the bright strip works. When he's filled his buckets and readies to check out, he asks, "So I guess you have to unplug that shiny tape every night?" ❖

Jim Minick teaches at Radford University and operates a blueberry farm in southwest Virginia.

Blueberry picker and bird-scare device. Photo courtesy Sarah Minick.

HIGH TIME FOR CHANGE

Michael Joslin

This past September I climbed an old fire tower on the Blue Ridge Parkway to watch as flocks of broad-winged hawks crossed the Black Mountains on their way to Central and South America. Traveling in groups called "kettles," several hundred of the migratory birds approached from the north, rose in spiraling gyres as they rode thermals to reach an altitude high enough to cross the loftiest mountain range in the East, then soared gracefully over the ridge.

After spending the weekend watching majestic raptors ride the rolling air, on the following Monday I visited the Blue Ridge Wildlife Institute at Lees-McRae College, where I saw three injured broad-winged hawks, one of them clearly gunshot through the abdomen. The contrast between the high-flying, acrobatic masters of the air Sunday and the caged, depressed birds Monday dramatized the barbarism of wantonly killing or crippling what are in reality helpful friends of humankind.

Birds of prey such as hawks, owls, and eagles are essential to creating a healthy ecosystem in a rural environment. These birds eat a large number of rats, mice, rabbits, and other rodents each year, keeping populations of these destructive animals from growing out of control. Rats and mice not only consume large amounts of grain and other farm products, but they also can be extremely destructive to houses, sheds, and barns. When their natural predators diminish, the small mammals flourish. And while hawks do prey on game birds, these same raptors prey equally on the pests that eat the eggs and chicks of grouse, quail, turkeys, and doves.

So why do these beneficial birds find themselves targets so often?

"It's really just a cultural thing," said Nina Fischesser, director of the institute, as she led me to the flight cage where hawks recover their strength. "When I first came to this area, I couldn't believe people would kill hawks. Why would they take a chance on a $10,000 fine and prison time?

"Then when I started talking to schoolchildren during wildlife programs, they would say that it's because the hawks eat chickens. It's a cultural thing handed down generation after generation."

Injured broadwing tries his wings in flight cage. Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.

In the past when every family had chickens wandering around the farm and the margin between survival and disaster was thin, there may have been some excuse for shooting predators from the sky, explained Fischesser, but in fact, the number of chickens actually stolen by raptors was always fairly small. A full-grown hen or rooster is generally too large for most raptors to carry off.

Yet dove, quail, and grouse are fair game for most large hawks, a fact that has aggravated hunters. Other hard feelings remain from the days when newborn lambs and goats sometimes made a meal for mountain eagles. In the early 1990s when the U. S. Forest Service put goats on the Roan Highlands to manage the vegetation, I noticed a large raptor swooping from the skies to look over these same goats. A golden eagle had happened upon a scene common in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—tasty herbivores on the balds. My friend Cleo Edwards, born and raised on the slopes of Grassy Ridge Bald, told me that losing young lambs to eagles had led area farmers to shoot the majestic birds on sight. Over generations, that attitude has become part of many families' heritage.

"Now it's just a mindset. If you see a hawk, shoot it," said Fischesser, kneeling over the injured broadwing to show the bullet holes in its abdomen.

The angry bird settled down on the floor of the flight cage when she covered its fiercely glaring eyes with a heavy welding glove and pointed to the twin holes.

"At first he was very weak and dehydrated. The wound was infected. He had some external parasites which may indicate he had been on the ground for some time. Many times when people find an injured animal, it may have been out there for a while after the initial injury," she said, smoothing down the soft feathers.

After treating the wound, Fischesser and her staff bandaged it to halt the infection.

"Luckily he was not a real squirmy, hyper bird. He was able to keep his bandage on. He now stays in this flight cage with another pair of broadwings. He is flying well, doing great. As soon as the wound closes up, we will release him," she said, pulling the glove off his head and gently swinging the hawk to an upright position.

When she let him go, the hawk flew swiftly to a perch at the far end of the flight cage. Fischesser was concerned that the wound had not closed and that it might need stitches. Nonetheless, she believes she will be able to release the feisty bird to soar once again.

Other patients at the institute have not been so fortunate. The preceding week the staff had to put down a red-tailed hawk.

"The people who brought it in said they heard their neighbor's gunshots, then found the hawk. We had to put it to sleep. Even though we suspect who shot it, it's very hard to prove 'who done it,'" said Fischesser. "The red-tailed hawks are really the ones gunshot most often. They sit around on telephone wires using their incredible long-range eyesight looking for mice and rats, and people shoot them."

Fischesser's answer to this problem is education to break the cycle of generation following generation with the attitude that the only good hawk is a dead hawk.

"The cultural aspect only reinforces the idea of education and how important it is. If we can teach the children, then there might be an end to it. The class I'm teaching here at Lees-McRae this semester is geared on the students going out to schools to do wildlife programs."

The reward Fischesser and her students value most is the sight of once crippled hawks returning to the element where they belong. She hopes to watch the broadwing fly away into the sky and soar southward with a flock.

A hawk or eagle soaring against a Carolina blue sky is one of nature's most moving sights, stirring us deeply. Freedom and power define the majestic birds that have few natural enemies and a fierce will to survive. This aura of unfettered pride led our forefathers to choose a raptor as our national symbol. Unfortunately, many trigger-happy gunners find that same proud air an affront to their human superiority and shoot down any hawk or eagle their bullets can reach.

One of nature's most pathetic sights is one of these regal birds staggering on earth trying to reach the heavens, stranded in a foreign element because it has been knocked from the sky. With fierce eyes glaring and nail-sharp talons ready to rend, the injured bird is helpless.

Every year when days shorten and nights cool, many varieties of hawks and eagles migrate down the Blue Ridge, seeking their southern homes for the winter. Such places as Hawksbill, Table Rock, Ship Rock, and Beacon Heights on the Blue Ridge Parkway and Big Bald Mountain on the Tennessee/North Carolina line provide excellent vantage points for observing the annual migration.

Awe-inspiring flights of soaring raptors move me to spread the word that shooting them is both a mistake and a crime. They should be protected for their beauty, their important niche in our ecology, their roles as symbols in our society, and for their ability to raise our spirits as high as their flight. ❖

Michael Joslin lives with his wife Pam on a farm in the Buladean community of Mitchell County, North Carolina. He is a professor at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina.

HIGH IN FLIGHT: AVIAN APPALACHIA

Caitlin Kight

The popular birding magazine *Birder's World* recently compiled top 25 lists of readers' favorite places in the U.S. to watch warblers and eagles. Of the fifty total sites, only two were in Appalachia: for warblers, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, spanning the Tennessee-North Carolina state line, and for eagles, the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Kempton, Pennsylvania.

Appalachian sites might have shown up more frequently if these lists had focused on different groups of birds—game species such as turkeys, grouse, and bobwhites, for instance; or rarer birds people make trips specifically to see, such as cerulean, worm-eating, and golden-winged warblers. But perhaps not. Like other aspects of Appalachia that are enjoyed by locals and often overlooked by outsiders, the wealth of birds in this area is, in many respects, an undiscovered secret. Roving western birders fly east over the mountains on their way to observe the bird migration bonanza in Cape May, New Jersey, while eastern birders fly west toward the Texas coastline. All would do well to stop and take a closer look below them, at the approximately 105 million acres comprising the Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region (AMBCR), the focus of conservation and management efforts by the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture.

The AMBCR encompasses all thirteen states included in the Appalachian Regional Commission charter, plus two neighboring states. This same area includes eleven Partners in Flight regions.

Why all the attention? Appalachia is one of three major biodiversity hotspots in the United States (the other two being in Hawaii and California). The mountain range hosts approximately 240 different avian species, as many as can be found in some parts of the Amazonian rain forest. Of these, 185 spend their summers breeding among the deciduous broad-leaf trees and evergreen needle-leaf conifers that dominate the Appalachian landscape. Some 150 species live there year-round. The rest appear only briefly, stopping by to take advantage of the abundant feeding and sheltering opportunities as they pass through during the spring and fall migrations.

Even within Appalachia, many resident birders are probably unaware of the spectacular wealth of birds in their own backyards—including many endangered populations. Forty-eight Appalachian species (almost a quarter of the total) are conservation watch list or stewardship species. At least thirty-three

Dark-eyed junco. Photo courtesy Bob Schamerhorn. www.iPhotoBirds.com

species have more than 10 percent of their total North American population in the Appalachian Mountains, and at least ten more species have over a quarter of their entire population there. Almost 80 percent of all the cerulean warblers in the world are concentrated in Appalachia.

The cerulean warbler is a good place to start when learning about distinctive Appalachian birds. A species of high conservation priority, the cerulean is a small, blue-streaked songster that spends its time high in the canopies of mature trees. Unfortunately, these same trees are of interest to loggers and mountaintop-removal miners. Their work is devastating not only to the cerulean but to many other species as well, including worm-eating warblers, wood thrushes, and American woodcocks.

One of the remarkable things about Appalachia is the diversity of its habitats. Lush forests are only the endpoint of a growth process that begins with grasslands and includes many intermediate phases. Different notable species can be found in each of these habitats. For instance, the Henslow's sparrow is a rather nondescript brown bird that can be found in open, flat grasslands. Originally, it lived either on the prairie or in Atlantic Coast marshes. However, as people created new grasslands in the mountains between these two populations, the sparrows expanded their range. Now, though, they are beginning to decline. So, too, are the golden-winged warbler and the Appalachian Bewick's wren, though the latter may already be extinct. These two species haunt (or haunted) open woodlands and scrubby areas that spring up in the wake of clearcutting and land abandonment.

Happily for birds and birders alike, though, there are many more whose populations are quite healthy. One such species is the dark-eyed junco, a dainty little sparrow with a white belly, a slate-colored back, and a conspicuous pink bill. (That is how they look in Appalachia, but there are fifteen races of junco across the country.) Many Appalachian birders only see juncos in the winter, when they are frequent visitors at feeders. Along the spine of the mountains, however, juncos can be found year-round.

Juncos are one of the primary species being studied at Mountain Lake Biological Station, a research facility maintained by the University of Virginia in the mountains of southwestern Virginia. The entire station encompasses approximately 600 acres, jointly managed by conservancy groups, the federal government, and private landowners. There, Indiana University biologist Ellen Ketterson has spent years documenting nearly every conceivable aspect of junco life. She has investigated the junco genome, measured hormone levels and physical characteristics, looked at effects of fluctuating environmental stimuli, evaluated breeding success, recorded vocal behavior, and examined movements of individual birds between local populations. She and her colleagues have begun filming a documentary about this amazingly comprehensive research.

Not surprisingly for an area of such rich bird diversity, there are other sites in Appalachia where

respected bird research is being conducted. The MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) program of the Institute for Bird Populations has several bird-banding stations throughout the mountain range, including several in the Shenandoah National Park of northern Virginia and on the outskirts of the George Washington National Forest near Brandywine, West Virginia. Farther north and east is Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, a popular eagle-viewing spot in the Kittatinny Ridge area of southeastern Pennsylvania. Although the sanctuary itself only covers 2,600 acres, it is associated with an additional 13,000 acres of private and public lands.

Staff and researchers at Hawk Mountain specialize in raptor conservation. The sanctuary has been keeping records of spring and autumn hawk migration counts for years, in addition to studying raptor community habitat use and social dynamics and examining the breeding and wintering ecology of American kestrels. However, songbirds do not go overlooked here. Their migration and breeding efforts are recorded, too, and studies have focused on the effects of forest fragmentation on local ovenbird populations.

Finally, no survey of Appalachian bird research could overlook the Hubbard Brook research facility in the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire.

Group of birdwatchers on the move at the New River Birding and Nature Festival. Photo courtesy Julie Zickefoose.

Hubbard Brook is legendary for its long-term database of pretty much everything that influences the health of a forest: hydrology, geology, chemistry, biology, and dynamics of the associated aquatic ecosystems. Here, researchers have been studying bird abundance and breeding success, under a variety of different treatment conditions, since 1969. Specific studies have investigated the role of birds in ecosystem nutrient cycling and energy flow, bird-insect interactions, bird foraging behavior in relation to insect availability, formation of bird communities, bird reproductive success and survival, nest predation rates, and bird population regulation—a truly impressive catalog of information.

Perhaps the most lauded bird gathering in the Appalachians is the New River Birding and Nature Festival, held in and around the New River Gorge in West Virginia. Birders who attend this springtime event may see as many as one hundred different species a day, including approximately thirty warbler species—many of the birds only stopping briefly in the region as they wing their way north for summer breeding. Local specialties include the golden-winged and cerulean warblers, as well as the Swainson's warbler, one of the most difficult birds to observe in the wild. Rarer sightings have included the clay-colored sparrow and even an arctic tern.

The New River Birding and Nature Festival was originally started as part of the Appalachian Regional Commission's effort to build sustainable tourism. The region is home to many beautiful recreational areas that are protected by state and national laws, but many outlying areas are not. The local ecology is especially threatened by mountaintop removal practices, which have already affected approximately 700,000 acres. Some 450 mountaintops and summits have been destroyed, over 2,000 miles of streams have been polluted or filled in, and more than 7 percent of Appalachian forests have been cut down. Estimates suggest that, if mountaintop removal continues at its current pace, 1.4 million acres will be lost by the end of the decade.

Another potential threat to bird populations is the installation of wind farms. Throughout Appalachia, there are six wind energy plants currently online and another fifteen in development. If all proposed projects are completed, there could be as many as 1,000 turbines dotting the ridges of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia. Although this alternative source of energy may be less harmful to the overall ecosystem than, say, coal mining, it is troublesome for birds. Studies in California have shown that turbines kill 1,000 raptors each year. In Appalachia, these figures would likely need to be adjusted upward to include the migratory songbirds who fly along the mountain ridges, often at night, when they might not be able to see the deadly obstacles.

Against the backdrop of these dangers, Appalachia is blessed with a wealth of organizations interested in the protection of the region's birds: the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, and the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture among them. Grassroots organizations include Appalachian Voices and the Alliance for Appalachia. The area is also home to the headquarters of *Bird Watcher's Digest* (in Marietta, Ohio), the first consumer magazine about birdwatching. The only nationally-distributed, family-owned and -operated birding magazine, it publishes articles that describe techniques for cultivating healthy backyard avian communities, provides advice for picking birding-friendly vacation spots, and alerts readers about important issues threatening the health of wildlife.

All told, Appalachia is a pretty remarkable place for birds and bird-lovers alike. Here, it is possible to see one of the smallest North American birds, the ruby-throated hummingbird, a summer breeder, and one of the largest, the golden eagle, a winter visitor. There are birds that are rare elsewhere, such as the cerulean warbler, and others that are just plain rare, Kirtland's warblers in migration. Sooner or later, these and many other avian wonders are going to draw enough attention to add a few more Appalachian sites to the next round of the *Birder's World* top 25 lists. Until then, those of us already in on the secret can count ourselves lucky. ❖

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HERON

Cheryl Lewis

Venus left hours ago
in the wake of a pale ghost

moon. Splintered light
lifts plume feathers

quiet against the spreading
dawn. An efficiency

of shape and shadow this
altar of bones—

hollow flutes to float the air
like early morning

spider silk—
wet and spangled blue.

Cheryl Lewis is an administrative associate at Ohio University with a B.S. in communication. Her work has appeared in *Appalachian Heritage, Blue Collar Review,* and *The Aurorean.*

REACHING UP

Caron Castle

Every October flocks of tourists migrate to the blazing peaks at Bays Mountain Park in Kingsport, Tennessee. I knew I would have company on this hike, but I had received some bad news and needed peace and quiet to sort through my feelings. I threw my camera bag over my shoulder, tightened my shoelaces, and stepped out of the car. I hoped the park's guests weren't feeling chatty. I needed a meditative, drama-free walk along the Lakeside Trail.

I parked next to a shiny luxury car and watched a beautiful blonde with a short skirt, strappy heels, and a purse with a flashing gold buckle step out. She looked around with a wrinkled nose and pointed at her tanned, rugged boyfriend with her long, red nail.

"Hey, he says it's too cold today for mosquitoes and spiders. Is that true?"

I tucked my hair behind my ear and gave him a long look. He smirked, but there was a plea in his eyes. I was determined not to interact with anyone that day, but I could spare a white lie. I smiled and nodded despite the trick question. Sure, it was chilly, but insects are optimists and will crawl out with the least promise of warmth any day in fall or winter, and even during a snow melt if the sun is right. And this was an especially sunny day. As I nodded, a crane fly swooped past the blonde head, but she was distracted by the cell phone pressed to her ear so, at least until she stepped off pavement, the conspiracy against her was solid.

It was a rare day on the mountain. The air smelled of warm bark and pine needles, yellow pools of light dotted the ground beneath paint-by-number trees, and all was covered over with that incredible blue October sky that only children believe when rendered on film. Fall had just begun, the sourwoods and maples were beginning to flame, and the ground was covered with crunchy brown locust leaves. The sun filtered down through the hemlocks and washed the rarified air in the deep woods, and as I walked I started to feel . . . braver.

It was a mast year for red oak, hickory, and beech. The ground was so littered with nuts that the woodland creatures were more agreeable than usual, not as hurried, and voiced fewer complaints when I

Photo courtesy Bays Mountain Park, Kingsport, Tennessee.

entered the woods. Even the Carolina Wren, the Blue Jay, and the Eastern Chipmunk—those perpetual loudmouths who always sell me out when I approach the forest—even they let me enter and pass with little comment.

I had been keeping track of boom and bust years since I was a kid and knew it was this abundance that calmed the beasts of the wood. I understood the lack of scolding was due to the surplus of seeds, but in my pensive mood I took it as a welcome.

Very few studies have been published about masting behavior and as yet, we don't fully understand the phenomenon. In cycles of three to five years, trees of various species will collectively produce extravagant volumes of seeds, so many that the foraging critters

He tilted his bristled chin as if to indicate the thick carpet of acorns beneath his hooves and as if to say, "Have some; there's plenty."

cannot possibly consume them all. For a few subsequent years, the same cluster of trees produces a stingy crop. The effects of this behavior are obvious: A massive seed drop means that all are not eaten, many are stashed, and quite a few survive to sprout and thrive the next year. But the *cause* of masting is a mystery. Because different species share and withhold crops in varying cycles, seasonal weather changes such as drought or flooding seem to have little measurable effect on the production of seeds. No other factors have been pinpointed as the trigger for a windfall; neither the numbers of foragers nor the presence of plant disease seems to affect masting behavior.

I've heard hunters, farmers, and hikers comment on this humbling quirk of the environment all my life, and I've never understood why science has shown little interest in masting behavior. Maybe we simply no longer spend enough time outside to notice the windfall, or perhaps scientists are uncomfortable with phenomena which cannot be tampered with or altered in some way. I don't know. It seems to me that creatures capable of running entire ecosystems without moving are beyond the powers of reason and conjecture.

Right away on the trail, I met a deer calmed by the abundance of food. He tilted his bristled chin as if to indicate the thick carpet of acorns beneath his hooves and as if to say, "Have some; there's plenty." I didn't want to explain that tannins in acorns would burn my mouth unless I boiled them several times to leech out the poison, dried the nuts, then pounded them into flour for my bread. Instead I knelt down politely, gathered a few, and stuffed my pockets full. I would have felt silly explaining to one so beautifully adapted how ill equipped I am to enjoy the bounty.

A few more steps and I heard a ruckus somewhere ahead of me on the trail, the cacophony a series of 'd' notes signaling that a predator is near. I hurried on and a wren flew to meet me. She trilled, "Hurry, hurry it's a murderer!" and a titmouse joined her, and then a pair of chickadees complained. By the time I reached the circle of panic, some thuggish Blue Jays had joined in. The branches in the clearing were bouncing with the weight of about thirty calling birds, and the noise and flashes of color from the trees around me were unnerving. I saw no threat circling in the sky above, though surely a Cooper's Hawk would be summoned soon by the din. I scanned the edges of the clearing for the stump-shape of a bobcat but saw nothing capable of harm.

The excited noise continued, and the wrens, made brave by the sheer number of the feathered army, nearly brushed my face as they loaded the dogwood I was standing near. I clapped my hands once for silence and could just make out the rustling of dry leaves—indication of a legless thing, a ground-creeping thing, a scaly thing with a reputation made sinister by millions of small creatures the world round. I stepped closer to the sound, announcing my presence with heavy footfalls, because I couldn't spot the slithering outline in the leaf litter. Like the panicked birds, I needed to spot the sharp end.

The chorus started in again just as I spotted a corn snake, five feet long, its garish pattern blending with the colored leaves. Corn snakes prefer to eat small furry things rather than high feathered things but will occasionally climb trees and swallow eggs or young birds. "Hush!" I told the frantic birds. "Your young are long out of the nest; you've nothing to lose to this creature."

I didn't blame them, really, for feeling anxious about a misunderstood thing. We are all guilty of unreasonable fears. The world is a scary place, and many worrisome things are deserving of mistrust. But when every living creature views you with a narrowed eye, regards your motives as suspect, cites biblical precedent for shunning you, and looks at the lumps in your belly with suspicion, you need an advocate.

I pinned the corn snake with a long stick, gently grabbed him behind the head, looped him across my forearm, and carried him against my belly to a sunlit clearing I knew was fairly free of shrubs,

low limbs, and other likely perching sites for gossiping songbirds. I knelt to the ground, freed the alleged adversary, and watched the slandered creature disappear seamlessly in the sun-dappled leaves.

It's comforting, really, having less than the usual fears of the howling wilderness. Well, comforting for me, that is. For the snake I assume that sort of intimacy was a bit humiliating. I apologized for tampering with its agenda, dusted off my jeans, and picked the trail back up. A goldfinch flew alongside me for a few yards, cheerily stitching the shadows together. At the park's wildlife food plot, a gang of yearling deer, showing off button horns, bucked and swaggered when I came near. A squirrel mimicked a hawk just before a winged shadow fell chilly across my shoulders, and I didn't have to look up to know that a red-tail was prowling. Though songbirds tend to exaggerate danger, squirrels never lie about such things. But I'd interfered enough, and there wasn't much I could do to re-direct a diving raptor, so I kept my head down and continued on my way.

I reached the patch of sugar maple, poplar, and sourwood I wanted to photograph in their outrageous fall apparel and lost my breath in the face of so much saturated color. I was sighting the brilliant orange crown of a maple through the lens when voices and crunching leaves announced hikers. The scent of patchouli greeted me before they did, but it was a pleasant muskiness that blended nicely with the leaf mold and warm earth. There were four boys, almost men, around eighteen or so. They each had messy hair, an assortment of tattoos, and one sported quarter-sized blue glass plugs in his ears that caught the light and threw circles on the ground behind him. The blonde boy peered into the tree above and asked, "What is it?" I looked up slowly, scanned the patchwork sky, and grinned. They looked up. Three were confused, but one got it. He started to spin, slowly, still gazing skyward.

"Whoa. Dude, try this. This is awesome. We should totally come back up here and get baked."

The others joined him, and they accidently synched up, spinning at the same slow rate as they watched the leaves kaleidoscope above. I tiptoed through the whirling dervishes and left the holy stoners to their reverie.

After a hard mile, I reached the highest peak and stopped at a point where the undergrowth was sparse beneath the spreading crowns. Those trees were ancient, with lateral limbs as big as my waist and knobby tree roots pushing down the ground. I looked up at the towering trees reaching, reaching, and back down at the ground solidly covered in nuts. It seemed that the trees were doing more than shedding seeds for the next generation; they were dropping ballast, lightening their load, and stretching skyward. As if at any moment they might just pull up roots and float free of the tethers that bind them here. I wouldn't have blamed them, really, if with a massive groan they showered me with dirt and stones and simply floated up. On that day I wanted to reach for the impossibly blue October sky and float up, too. ❖

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Dam and reservoir at Bays Mountain Park. Photo courtesy Bays Mountain Park.

FEDERAL OVERSIGHT

Ginger Manley

Smith Cemetery. Photo courtesy Keith Harding.

If it had been a wild turkey that had taken up roost in the dead upper branches of the tree, then it might have gone almost completely unnoticed. But it wasn't a wild turkey. It was a bald eagle, and eagles are pretty scarce in East Tennessee. The first sightings of these majestic birds in the wild were reported here in 2005, and news of a sighting is always accompanied by expressions of awe at the grandeur that a single eagle or, more wonderfully a nesting pair, evokes in the viewer.

Bald eagles are one of the largest predatory birds in North America. Their habitat includes every continental state where there is abundant water and tall trees. They mate for life and build their nests, called eyries, atop these tall trees or in some cases on platforms constructed by humans who prefer them not to nest on top of power or telephone poles. A nesting pair will hatch one to three eaglets a year.

In 1972 bald eagles were listed on the endangered species list after DDT pesticides and rampant hunting almost drove them to extinction. Since then, the eagles have recovered, largely because of intense private and public efforts. When they were removed from the list in 2007, the number of pairs throughout North America had increased to over 10,000. Dollywood, in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, has helped repopulate the Smoky Mountain area through its hatching program. In April 2008, Dolly Parton released eagle number ninety, which she named Liberty in commemoration of the eagle's role as a symbol of the United States.

The story goes that Ben Franklin was much opposed to making the eagle the representative image of the new federal government. He lobbied for the wild turkey as a symbol, having much more admiration for its character traits than he had for those of the eagle. But Ben's opponents won out, and for over 200 years the eagle has staunchly—or some might argue menacingly—stood guard over the Union.

At first I didn't believe what I was told about the eagle roosting in a dead tree, but then I received an e-mail with a photograph from the man who had seen it. It was clearly a bald eagle, with the well-defined white head and neck marking it as mature, at least six years of age. Silhouetted as it was, sitting on the stark branches against the brazen blue sky, the eagle clearly had staked its turf right next to my family's ancestral cemetery.

The Smith/Smyth Cemetery is located on one-tenth of an acre of high ground in the middle of a peninsula known as Bay Pointe near the southeastern

edge of Loudon County, Tennessee. The cemetery overlooks the remaining deep channel of the Little Tennessee River on one side and Tellico Lake on the other. From the ground above, you can see the Great Smoky Mountains rising through the early morning fog, about thirty miles away.

At one time the Smith cemetery and its adjacent, now-underwater land had been a 400-acre farm where my maternal ancestors had settled after migrating from Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina in 1825—homesteading, birthing, dying, planting, prospering, and floundering. My great-grandfather, James Garland Smith III, was the last Smith farmer to be buried there, in 1903. Altogether five Smiths, seven Johnsons who were neighbors, three Cooks who may have been Smith relatives, and three unknown persons were buried in this little graveyard, one of about thirty family cemeteries in Loudon County. Many of them were left behind or forgotten when the families moved away. Today these cemeteries in Tennessee and elsewhere are permanently catalogued using GPS tracking technology.

Until the mid-1990s the land where the Smith cemetery sits had been virtually inaccessible to outside exploration for fifty years, except by logging trucks harvesting timber and teenagers in ATVs seeking Saturday night thrills. When the Tennessee Valley Authority began construction on the Tellico Dam in the 1970s, this entire area began to be transformed from a network of mostly isolated, single-family, red-dirt farms to the most sought-after real estate in the region. Droves of retirees from California, the Midwest, and the Northeast, who might have in an earlier generation migrated to Florida, now eagerly bought land and built their dream homes in this most beautiful of places.

When I was growing up in nearby Maryville in the 1940s and '50s, many of the families I knew had a hatred for TVA. I could never quite understand this enmity as a child, since it seemed to me like a good thing for the government to facilitate the electrification of the rural South. I did not then know or understand that in order for TVA to bring power to all those rural outposts, they had to build dams on the rivers, so that the water's energy could be captured and transferred to the power lines strung from community to community. When dams back up rivers, they flood all the low land behind them. When people are forced off their land at prices way below market value and when the forcing is done by an arm of the federal government, the taste left in the mouths of those forced out is rancid.

My family was forced off its land before TVA came along. My grandfather lost the family farm in 1932 when the Bank of Loudon called in his note of about $300, the result of his having mortgaged and re-mortgaged the land through the late 1920s as his family grew to include a wife, a mother, and five children all living in one house.

Little by little all the farms in the area near my grandfather's homeplace were abandoned, either through situations like his or as TVA acquired the land. By the 1960s, TVA owned more than 22,000 acres of land, including some 1,800 acres in the channel of the Little Tennessee River. Most landowners were paid around $200 per acre for their property. When the Tellico Dam was completed, much of the bottomland in its path disappeared from view forever as the water rushed in.

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From the time he left the farm until he died in 1974 while hoeing strawberries in the garden behind his new home in the city, my grandfather mourned the loss of the Smith property. One of his five children, his second daughter, Alice, was a senior in high school when the family left the farm. She graduated, immediately went to work to help support the family, and eventually married my father. Before the waters covered the farm for good, my grandfather and my father returned to the abandoned land and removed as many of the boxwoods as they could. They replanted these shrubs in the backyards of our and my grandparents' homes in Maryville, where some of them remain today.

After the reservoir was filled in 1976, there was no trace left of the Smith farm except for the little cemetery, on the highest land and safe from the flood. Although there were no paved roads, the Smith siblings, especially my mother, periodically visited the area when they could hire a logging truck and driver. My first visit to the cemetery was in such a truck on a hot August Sunday in 1986. The driver first took us to the wrong cemetery. A half mile on, through the dense undergrowth, my mother spotted a copse of three oak trees with a dead tree of unknown origin aligned to the right. "This is it," she said. "I can feel it in my bones."

It took another ten years for paved roads to be put in by the developer who would eventually build the community now known as Rarity Bay. A few years before my mother died, I returned to the cemetery with her. Passing the golf course and the multi-thousand-square-foot homes, she said, "Your grandfather would not believe that today people are teeing off where he used to plant his Silver Queen corn."

We made our way up the steep red-clay banks to the little graveyard. The stones were falling over, toppled years before by grazing cows or vandals. The rough iron fence was nowhere to be found. Groundhogs had taken up permanent residence in the soil. Tangles and brush overlay almost everything. My mother looked at me and said, "Take care of this when I am gone. It's who you are."

After my mother died in 2004, I hired an archaeologist who specializes in conserving old cemeteries in the South to begin the process of preserving the Smith cemetery. The job was completed in 2008, and the dedication took place on a brilliant fall Sunday under those old oak trees. As eighty or so family members and friends gathered, we noticed one lone bald eagle circling high above us, riding the thermals. Near the end of the service, just after I remarked that we welcomed the eagle and considered it to be the embodiment of our ancestors' spirit, three bald eagles in formation appeared from the east and did a flyover.

The Smith ancestors didn't tell stories or write journals. They farmed and they survived and along the way the four generations of Smiths who came before my mother put pieces of paper and other small remains of their lives into a box—a cardboard box that I inherited after my mother's passing. She had told me frequently, "If you ever need money, get into that box. There are treasures inside it."

I took the box and its contents to a local "Antiques Roadshow" appraiser who rapidly quashed my dreams of sudden wealth when she told me that on a good day the contents might net about fifteen dollars at auction. What she didn't tell me was that from those scraps of my ancestors' lives I would reclaim the part of my backstory I had never fully grasped.

The box yielded stories of the original seizing of the land from the Cherokees by the state of Tennessee; the federal resettlement of the natives to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears which began near the Smith homeplace; the proximity of the Smith farm to the path taken by General Sherman from Chattanooga toward Knoxville to ensure that East Tennessee would remain in Union hands; the pathos of the Johnsons who in 1864 lived near the Smiths with their twelve children, five of whom died within the same twelve months, three in the same week from scarlet fever; the museum-quality quilt made by my fourth-great-grandmother, Elizabeth Smith, widowed with five children before the start of the Civil War; the almost unknown stories of the two slaves buried in the cemetery; the time in the late 1800s when the Smiths changed the spelling to Smyth, then returned to Smith; the tragic loss of the homeplace during the Great Depression; and the ultimate and permanent disappearance of the farmland under the water.

Federal oversight has not always been a good omen for the inhabitants of this land, but I am hoping that the bald eagle that has chosen with its mate to nest near the Smith cemetery will prove to be of better character than Ben Franklin believed, keeping watch as the Smith generations rest in peace. I don't think a wild turkey could do the job. ❖

Ginger Manley is a sixth-generation Tennessean who now lives in Franklin. She edited *Gotcha Covered: A Legacy of Service and Protection*, published in 2009.

NOT SO HIGH ANY MORE:

Middle School Lessons About Mountaintop Removal

Meghan Lundy-Jones

From the highest peak east of the Mississippi, you can see a 360-degree view of the Appalachian mountains. The rolling hills remind you of the bottom of the ocean, different shades of blue getting lighter the farther the distance. If you close your eyes, you can almost imagine what this place was like without the Blue Ridge Parkway, the houses and towns in the valleys, the spruce and fir trees unsubjected to acid deposition or the Balsam woolly adelgid. Open them again and you find a family with wind-swept hair posing in front of the sign, "Mt. Mitchell, elevation 6684 ft." Folks come from all over the world to get as high as they can on these mountains, posing with family members or flexed muscles to show what an accomplishment it is to climb this far above the rest of the world.

I have the privilege of living just below these mountains—the Blacks, we call them. Each year I hike from the bottom of the valley to the top of the ridgeline, usually for pleasure but sometimes for work. My job as a teacher includes backpacking with middle school students.

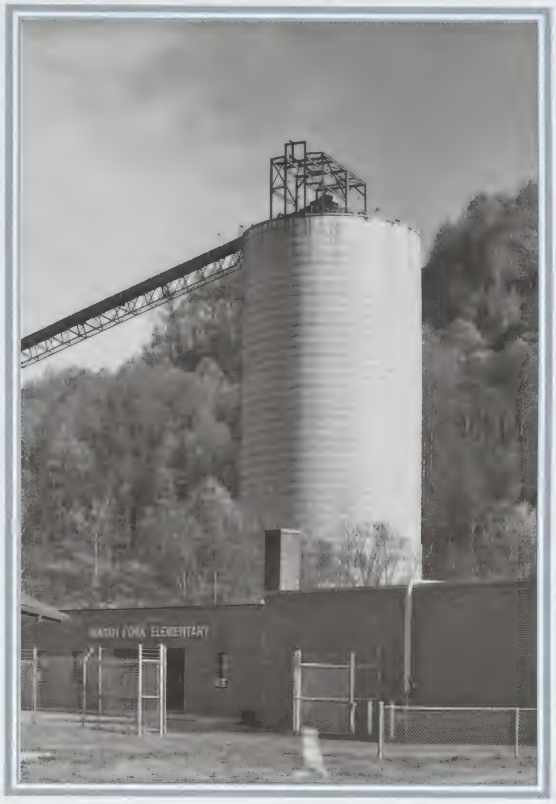
At the Arthur Morgan School, a small, innovative boarding and day school for seventh- through ninth-graders in Burnsville, North Carolina, one of the things we want our students to learn is how culturally and ecologically precious these mountains are. We humble ourselves each year by hiking into them, our trips ranging from three to six days and varying in difficulty as we explore the concept of self-sufficiency and a love for the outdoors.

On a wet and rainy morning in October, another teacher and I headed out with six students to hike to Asheville—forty-five miles in six days.

We had a brutal first day, with an elevation gain of 3,500 feet, pouring, driving rain, and backpacks filled with enough gear and food to make us feel fifty pounds heavier. Exhausted, we collapsed beneath tarps which dripped all night, and we prayed that the morning would bring enough sun to dry us out.

Arthur Morgan School students and staff visit the John E. Amos Power Plant in West Virginia. Photo courtesy Joe Haynes.

But the sun would stay hidden until we hit our campsite late in the afternoon. Giddy and wild, we split open our backpacks to reveal every wet item we owned and laid them in the grass to dry. The sunlight only lasted an hour before we had to gather our things, eat dinner, and get ready for bed, snuggling next to one another for warmth as the wind blew hard.



The next day was magical. We walked for miles through huge, towering blueberry bushes, staining our mouths with purple juices, laughing at each other as we tried to eat like bears—hands free, with stretched-out tongues.

After passing a roaring creek where we filled our water bottles, we ascended the east side of Mt. Mitchell, and the sun came out again. Out of breath and tired, we nestled among blueberry bushes, rhododendrons, and craggy rocks to take our boots and socks off for awhile. Lying there together, sun bathing, we looked out over the vast mountain views and reveled in the beauty.

This spring, some of those same students and I had a very different experience in the same range of mountains, just a few hours north in West Virginia coal country. For the same reason we explore so close to home, we like to take our students out to see other parts of the country. To really learn about cultural and ecological diversity beyond our little mountain ecosystem, we embark on an experiential adventure for eighteen days across the country in a bus. Each year, the school splits into thirds, and we travel different parts of the country to explore a social, environmental, or political topic. Some groups go to the border of Texas and Mexico to study immigration issues, while others go to northeastern cities to explore hunger and homelessness.

One group wanted to explore what happens on the other end of the light switch. How do we get electricity? What kind of social and environmental implications are there to generating power? What we found is that 45 percent of our electricity production is generated from coal, and much of that coal is being mined just north of where we happen to live. So we went to talk with folks about how this affects their lives and land.

Driving through the Green River Gorge, we felt at home as we traversed the mountains in our little bus. What we didn't realize is that just on the other side, where the coal seams run deep, the mountains were being blown away and the places where people like us called home were no longer there.

We drove our bus up to the peak of Kayford Mountain, home of Larry Gibson, a passionate spokesperson for the Appalachian mountains where his family has lived for centuries, and an avid coal-mining protestor. He took us into his rustic two-room cabin where we squeezed in tight to hear what he had to say about the horrors of mountaintop removal. We had seen some of the effects ourselves on our way up to his cabin: valleys filled with the tops of mountains and running streams turned orange from minerals released during the mining process. But walking out to a place on his property where the mountains used to be taller than his, we saw what the huge machines were taking away along with the coal: his home and connection to the Appalachian highlands.

We visited an elementary school located next to a coal-processing plant, and considered what it would be like to go to school with a 2.8 billion-gallon sludge pond hovering above. What if the dam broke, as other sludge pond dams have in the past?

We talked with people in the town who could no longer drink their water and had to purchase it from a grocery store.

We asked our students to imagine what it would be like if the Black Mountains had the kind of coal deposits that much of the Southern Appalachians hold. They frowned, considering the absence of the blueberry bushes, the spruce-fir forests, the trout in the river below. They know how complex the issue

Marsh Fork Elementary School sits in the shadow of a coal-processing plant. Photo courtesy B. Mark Schmerling.

is, how ingrained coal mining is in the culture of this place, and how differently we live, just below the coal seam line. Nevertheless, the idea of losing their own mountains alarms them.

Larry asks us to consider what we value in our lives more than anything. What would we fight for? Die for?

For him, this mountain holds his family heritage, and he is literally fighting for his life to keep it from becoming another ton of coal in a power plant somewhere. A bulletproof vest hangs on his wall, and he tells us how many times his life has been on the line.

When we return home, I look at those majestic mountains, covered in a thick layer of clouds, and I wonder what it would be like to hear blasts of TNT every day, to feel the shocks of the mountains coming down. I wonder how I would feel if my streams were destroyed, no longer safe to swim or fish in. What if I could no longer drink the water out of my tap? Would I fight for my life?

For many people who live in the Blue Ridge Mountains, it's not an option to fantasize and ask, "What if?" The reality is that some of the most ancient and biodiverse mountains in the world are being sacrificed for our luxury and our dependence on cheap and infinite energy. And the people whose families have lived there for centuries are being forced to leave the mountains behind or suffer the toxic consequences.

Although I'm sure the effects of mountaintop removal are not listed on most states' Standard Courses of Study, we will continue to use this topic to help our students appreciate and stand up for the world where they live. They may not have to fight for their own mountains. They can continue to experience the wonders of eating blueberries overlooking a glorious view for now. But perhaps they will stand up and fight for those who don't have the same luxuries they do. They have seen the effects of injustice with their own eyes, and they have met people they will continue to care about for the rest of their lives. ❖

Meghan Lundy-Jones is clerk and admissions coordinator at the Arthur Morgan School in Burnsville, North Carolina.

Larry Gibson and his dog on Kayford Mountain. Photo courtesy B. Mark Schmerling.

MT. REVELATION

Britt Kaufmann

They have sold their own inheritance,
the old families who farmed
these rocky slopes since their greats
stumped the only land they could afford—
so high as to look down and covet
a neighbor's bottom fields in flat acres,
where big houses rose next to everlasting waters.

They sold it to put soup in bellies
when the mountains and hills were made
low and the rough ridges plainly
became the place to own a second home.
Sold it and moved into the valley of shadow,
turned fallow fields into trailer parks.

Then rich men built their homes upon the rock—
so high as to hear the babble of newborn
creeks cast over the cliff's edge—
and gated the way so no one may
reach the door to knock or ask.

But the wealthy failed to raise
an altar to God, so wend their way
down Mt. Revelation to sit in pews with their
brothers and sisters, join the old quilter
who casts her eyes unto the hills,
sees those mansions through the eye
of her needle as she threads it to bind
together layers of a new comforter.

Britt Kaufmann lives outside Burnsville, North Carolina, with her three young children and husband. She helps plan the Carolina Mountains Literary Festival each fall.

MAHALA MULLINS:
The Facts Behind a Tennessee Folk Legend

Wayne Winkler

In the 1962 film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, newspaperman Maxwell Scott famously tells Senator Ransom Stoddard, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

That maxim has certainly been applied to Mahala Mullins, the legendary Melungeon moonshiner of Hancock County, Tennessee. Stories printed in newspapers and books focus primarily on her great weight, in some accounts as high as 800 pounds. She sold moonshine from her cabin, located on the Tennessee-Virginia state line. If revenue agents came, she could simply move from one side of the cabin to another and avoid arrest. In legend, Mahala stood seven feet tall, could out-wrestle four men, lift a yearling bull over her head, splinter an oak plank with her bare fist, and eat an entire pig for a meal. According to some newspaper accounts, Mahala bore quadruplets while in her seventies and was murdered under mysterious circumstances, only to have her body stolen from the grave. And the story goes that when she died, a chimney was removed from her cabin in order to extricate her body, which was either carried to the grave by her thirty-three husbands or wrapped in a quilt and rolled down the mountain.

Judging from these portrayals, Mahala Mullins might be seen as a mythical figure along the lines of Paul Bunyan. But she was a real person with a real story that sheds light on the place and times in which she lived.

Mahala Collins Mullins was a Melungeon—a people about whom much folklore and mythology have been formed. The Melungeons are a mixed-ethnic population, generally considered to be of African, European, and Native American ancestry, and closely associated with Hancock County. And Mahala Mullins was certainly the most famous Melungeon, a woman whose legend reached its peak during her lifetime and endures today.

Mahala was born in 1824 in Hancock County to Solomon and Gincie Collins. She married Johnnie Mullins and began raising children—at least twenty, fifteen of whom lived past early childhood—in a cabin on the north side of Newman's Ridge. (Contrary to legend, the cabin was not on the Virginia state line but was within easy walking distance of it.) The Mullins cabin, according to writer and Mahala descendent Jim Callahan, became a well-known source for moonshine whiskey. There is some indication that Mahala didn't actually make the whiskey herself but handled the financial end of the business. She accepted barter items, and the family had a large collection of skillets, knives, pots, guns, and ammunition.

During the Civil War, most of the folks in Hancock County, including most of the Melungeons,

Mahala Mullins showing the effects of elephantitis. Photo courtesy Digital Library of Appalachia.

supported the Union cause. The Mullins cabin, with its collection of useful material items, was a target for Confederates just across the state line in Lee County, Virginia. At Christmastime in 1863, Confederate raiders arrived to loot the cabin and to kill the Mullins sons and other relatives who were home on leave from the Union Army. The Union soldiers took cover and fired on the Rebels, who looted the house and set it on fire. The Mullins family frantically operated a conveyor bucket from a nearby spring and extinguished the flames, but the Confederates returned. They herded the family, including infants and small children, outside in the snow, torched the cabin, and remained long enough to see that it was burned beyond salvaging. As the raiders left, a furious Johnnie Mullins loaded

his rifle and forgot to remove the ramrod. According to Callahan, "[h]e fired, split the barrel, and lodged the ramrod in a rail fence down in the valley."

The rebuilt cabin was a reflection of the relative prosperity of the Mullins family. It consisted of two large rooms, separated by an open space, or "dogtrot," where cooking was done in hot weather. A large front porch was set off by two decorative arched windows. A narrow staircase led to a roomy loft where children slept. The house had a total of about 1,000 square feet and was one of the larger homes in the community.

The distillation of whiskey has a long history in the mountains stretching from New York to Georgia. Farms were generally small and cursed with poor, rocky soil. Scant corn harvests could be converted into a profitable value-added product with a minimum of effort and risk. Some years ago, a descendant of Mahala Mullins spoke to me and emphasized, "In those days, making whiskey wasn't against the law. It was against the law not to pay tax on the whiskey you made." In any event, the Mullinses paid no whiskey taxes and made a decent living for themselves.

The quality of Mahala Mullins' whiskey is a large part of the legend that grew up around her. By many accounts it was better-than-average moonshine. In his novel *Daughter of the Legend*, author Jesse Stuart writes of "Sylvania," a Melungeon moonshiner of unusual size obviously based on Mahala Mullins. A customer in the novel says, "When she sold you a gallon of moonshine you got a gallon of unadulterated moonshine and not two quarts of moonshine with a quart of water and a quart of carbide all stirred up well and shook before drinking."

Mahala had always been a large woman, but as the years passed she became very obese. At some point, she contracted elephantitis, a disease often caused by bacteria within a microscopic, parasitic worm transmitted by mosquitoes. However, the disease can also be caused by continued contact with soil containing sodium and potassium, or a repeated streptococcal infection. The name of the disease stems from the resemblance of the sufferer's limbs to the thick, baggy skin on the limbs and trunks of elephants; the disease is characterized by the thickening of the skin and underlying tissues, particularly in the legs. A photograph of Mahala shows her lifting her skirt to display the effects of the disease on her legs.

Her mobility—or lack thereof—is the heart of the legend. Numerous stories emerged and were printed in newspapers across the United States, dealing with the attempts of law enforcement agencies to bring the Melungeon moonshiner to justice. The *Atlanta Constitution* reported, "The federal grand jury has indicted her time after time, and officers have been sent to arrest her, but that was all....Her size baffled them. It would take half a dozen strong men to carry her out of the house and when outside was reached they would not be able to get her to the road at the bottom of the ridge."

The *Massilion Independent* claimed Mahala taunted law officers who came to serve warrants on her. "'Why don't you do your duty,' she asks in her fat, wheezy voice. 'I've been selling moonshine right along. Goin' to do it ag'in, soon's you uns get out er sight'....Thus does [Mahala] tantalize Uncle Sam's excise men until they go off in despair, leaving Mrs. Mullins mistress of the situation."

One of the more reliable reports concerns Hancock County sheriff Washington Eads. Details vary, but Sheriff Eads either determined to serve Mahala with a warrant or was ordered to do so by a judge. In either event, he visited the cabin, ascertained that Mahala could not be removed from the cabin by force, and reported to the judge that she was "ketchable, but not fetchable."

Although legend maintains that Mahala Mullins was unable to leave her cabin, much less maneuver her bulk down Newman's Ridge, descendant Kevin Mullins found documents to prove that on at

The Mullins cabin and some of its last known inhabitants, circa 1946. Photo courtesy Digital Library of Appalachia.

least two occasions she personally came into Sneedville in regard to land transactions—once in 1876 and again in 1889, less than nine years before she died. Those with a more intimate knowledge of Mahala dispute the reports that her weight was anywhere near the 600, 700, or even 800 pounds reported in the press. One man, whose mother knew Mahala, commented on the stories of Mahala's weight: "Uh, there's been guesses, and . . . I doubt if they knew, because there wouldn't be any scales or anything." A relative estimated that she weighed around 300 pounds.

Although moonshining has been somewhat romanticized in popular culture, the reality was far less glamorous or benign. Moonshine was destructive to the small, rural Appalachian communities of the late nineteenth century, just as methamphetamine and Oxycontin are to many of the same communities today. Hancock County was probably no worse than many others, but newspapers from the region recorded a legacy of violence and bloodshed connected with the whiskey trade.

On November 9, 1891, the *Morristown Gazette* reported, "Another tragedy near Luther Post Office, Hancock County . . . . N. G. Wolf killed Harmon Cope by shooting him with a pistol . . . . This tragedy was the result of whiskey, and makes the eighth man whose life has been lost in the last five months, in this neighborhood alone, from whiskey."

The Mullins family did not escape the violence associated with the whiskey business. Three sons of Johnnie and Mahala Mullins died violently. Richard was murdered "somewhere out west, perhaps in Oklahoma." According to Callahan, his gun misfired in a brawl and his throat was cut before his body was thrown down a well. Ollie died in an 1892 gunfight with Hancock County sheriff Grant Jarvis on Main Street in Sneedville. And Calvin was killed in 1895 by his nephew, Willie Davidson, who acted in self defense after Calvin attacked him while drinking at Mahala's cabin.

Even the deaths of Mahala's sons were sensationalized. In his 1895 book *The Moonshiners*, Henry Wiltsie exaggerates the number of Mahala's offspring who died violently: "Once every year, she causes her huge bulk to be transported to the cabin window, from which can be seen the graves of her five sons, every one of whom died tragically, and from this spot she watches the decoration of those graves with extravagance of beautiful wild flowers."

In the mid-1970s, folklorist Saundra Keyes Ivey conducted fieldwork in Hancock County and published an article entitled "Aunt Mahala Mullins in Folklore, Fakelore, and Literature." Although by this time most of those who had ever met Mahala had died, Ivey collected several anecdotes from people whose family members had known her. These comments were far less sensational than the published accounts and portrayed a kindly, gentle woman who, like her neighbors, struggled to feed her family.

One informant told Ivey, "My mother talked to her . . . and even felt of her hands and saw her feet and so on . . . . She told me she was one of the most beautiful women as far as her complexion. Her hands were so smooth, and they were very small and her feet were very small." A descendant of Mahala reported meeting a woman who often visited the Mullins cabin. "She said, 'Aunt Haley was a very, very sweet old lady.'

" . . . . Mahala could not be removed from the cabin by force, and reported to the judge that she was 'ketchable, but not fetchable.'"

And she said, 'She would give us gingerbread and something to drink—uh, not whiskey, milk [laughs]; milk or whatever she had.' They always expected something to eat when they went to her house."

After the death of her husband Johnnie, Mahala, her body ravaged by elephantitis, was cared for by her granddaughter Hattie. Callahan reports that Hattie regularly helped her grandmother onto her makeshift toilet: a galvanized washtub with a 4-foot-by-4-foot beam laid across it. Newspapers continued to print stories about her alleged exploits; at least two (in Indiana and Ohio) printed stories with a Knoxville dateline claiming that Mahala, then seventy-three years old, had given birth to quadruplets.

Despite her weight and ill health, however, Mahala continued to sell whiskey—and apparently brandy as well. Presbyterian missionary C. H. Humble wrote in 1897, "I asked what she was going to do with all the fruit in that large orchard. She replied, 'The boys know how to work that up.' I presumed into apple brandy, and she will do the rest . . . . Privately, I said, 'Why do you, so near the grave, go on selling this destructive stuff to the young men?' She replied, 'It's the only way I can make a livin'.'"

Mahala Mullins died soon after the visit reported by Humble. A handwritten obituary kept by her son Reuben reads, "Was borned March 30, 1824, Deceased September the 10th, 1898. Age 74 years, 5 months and 10 days. She profest faith in Christ a while before her Death and called for Johney and Rubin to give ther hands that they would meet her in heven. She told Stephen Gibson if she was never permitted to shake his hand in this world she would shake hands with him on the other Shore."

According to legend, Mahala's family had to remove a chimney from the house to get her body

out. However, an eighty-year-old descendant reported to Ivey in 1973, "The house had a chimney built here on this end [draws diagram] which has partly fallen down now. You saw that, didn't you? And at the other end of the house, when she died, the chimney had not been built. It wasn't built. But an opening was left for the chimney. And this opening was boarded over to prevent weather exposure. Then when they moved her body out, they did take the opening out, but the chimney was not built when she died. [Emphatically] So the chimney was not torn down."

One story, which persisted into the late 1960s, held that Mahala's family "wrapped her in quilts and gently rolled her down the hill to be buried." According to Ivey's informant, "No, they carried her out . . . . They did not have a coffin. She was on a four-poster bed . . . . They sawed the post off and boarded up the top of it, and that was her casket. In other words, they just made a box out of the bed, the top part of the bed."

Mahala was buried in her family cemetery, but the exact location of her grave is unknown.

News of Mahala's death spread rapidly and to places far removed from East Tennessee. The *Mexican Herald* reported her demise, including the information that she weighed 500 pounds. The *Nauguatuck Daily News* in Connecticut carried an account of her death and gave her weight as 650 pounds.

At least two newspapers, in Philadelphia and Tacoma, Washington, speculated that Mahala had been murdered. "She finally died in great agony, in a convulsion, with every symptom of poisoning. It is known that for some time past other moonshiners in the Cumberland have been envious of the woman and of her ability to carry on her work in defiance of the law."

Even after her death, newspapers continued to write outrageous stories about Mahala. In November of 1898, the *Spout Spring Times* in Kentucky told its readers, "A dispatch from Middlesborough says that 'the body of Mahala Mullins, the famous mountain woman moonshiner, who died some time since, has been stolen . . . . Just a week before her death she married a man named Johnson.'"

Mahala was legendary during her lifetime, and the legend continued long after her death. As Ivey wrote, the people of Hancock County were concerned "that the facts about Aunt Mahala be reported accurately—even though these facts may vary from informant to informant within the county. The concern for the 'truth' of Aunt Mahala's story stems not so much from a reverence for historical fidelity as from a desire that outsiders not misrepresent the county. Both as the home of the Melungeons and as part of Appalachia, Hancock County has long been linked by outside writers with slovenliness, violence, and the hillbilly stereotype in which moonshine plays a prominent part."

Many people were concerned that those writing about Mahala Mullins tended to borrow from earlier writings rather than seek out accurate information in Hancock County. According to Ivey, "An ambivalent attitude about the telling of Aunt Mahala anecdotes has therefore developed in Hancock County. On the one hand, there is pride in relating unique tales from the county's past, and the story of law enforcement officials' reporting that Mahala was 'ketchable but not fetchable' is told with gusto . . . . On the other hand, there is a justifiable wariness that the outsider may misrepresent the anecdote. While there is no sense of shame attached to Mahala's profession of bootlegging—a picture of her seated next to a container of whiskey with a dripping gourd in her hand was shown me by a number of persons—there is a desire that this fact be understood on the county's terms. Most of my informants sensibly recognized that moonshining represented one of the few viable economic alternatives open to Mahala Mullins and others like her; all they ask is that outsiders share this recognition and not use stories about Mahala to stereotype Hancock County as a moonshiner's haven."

Mahala's cabin on Newman's Ridge was occupied by various families after her death; the last known occupants bought the cabin after World War II. For many years, the cabin was vacant; weeds and briars filled the yard and covered the cemetery. People hiked up Newman's Ridge to the cabin and often took pieces of wood or larger items as souvenirs. Finally, in 2000, the Vardy Community Historical Society (VCHS) purchased the cabin, moved it off the ridge to a spot across the road from the former Presbyterian mission church (now the VCHS museum), and restored the structure. On summer weekends, VCHS members happily take visitors on tours of the cabin and provide an accurate representation of Mahala's life. It is appropriate that, after more than a century of legend, folklore, and "fakelore," the descendants of Mahala Mullins and other Melungeons are correcting the story of a remarkable Tennessee folk character.

Wayne Winkler is director of public radio station WETS-FM in Johnson City, Tennessee, and former president of the Melungeon Heritage Association. He is the author of *Walking Toward the Sunset: The Melungeons of Appalachia* (Mercer University Press, 2005).

HIGH ON THE MOUNTAIN:
Callie Hash Wright, Virginia's First Lady Mayor

Marilyn J. Bossmann

"I have had a good, long life, not all of it easy but wonderful by the will of God. I loved every day I have lived."

From a letter attached to Callie Hash Wright's last will and testament, dated February 14, 1980, and addressed to her children.

On Valentine's Day, nearly six years before her death, my maternal grandmother, Callie Hash Wright, composed this addition to her will, as she looked back on her life in Troutdale, the highest incorporated town in Virginia, 3,200 feet above sea level.

Recent memories of my grandmother do not conjure romantic notions of a strong, quiet woman. I often adhered to a dichotomous relationship with Callie, struggling to embrace or reject her spirited and natural ruggedness. I could not see my grandmother melting butter on Valentine's Day.

Four years ago, when I gathered renewed interest to explore Callie and mountains, I stopped in Troutdale to tour Ripshin, home of Sherwood Anderson, a friend of the family. As other carpetbaggers do, I wanted to lean on famous literary ghosts but instead reacquainted myself with my grandmother's mountains. In the graveled lot of the Sugar Grove Diner, I met up with Anderson devotee Don Francis, who also knew my grandmother. I asked him what he remembered about her. "She was from the mountains and lived in Sugar Grove and Troutdale and everyone thought highly of her," he answered.

Memories of my grandmother were vivid. She was strong-willed, a hard worker, strict, of few but important words, and clannish. But Don Francis' recollection did not match my experiences with a somewhat difficult personality.

"Callie could be a bit mean and at times was not very nice," I said to Mr. Francis. He bluntly retorted, "She was a mountain girl."

I found it difficult to imagine my grandmother as Virginia's first lady mayor, but after examining her character and mountain values, I am convinced her spirited character helped rescue Troutdale from the threat of extinction by a movement set to dissolve the town and reduce it to an insignificant mark in Grayson County.

Born in Sugar Grove on March 30, 1894, the third child of William Jackson Hash and Martha "Mattie" Scott Hash, my grandmother settled in Troutdale in 1921 with William Foster Wright, "Mr. Bill." The couple took an apartment above the First

Callie Hash Wright holding the author's mother, Carolyn Joy Wright Bossmann, in the town of Troutdale, Virginia, 1926. Photo courtesy Marilyn Bossmann.

National Bank in Troutdale, where my grandfather worked as a teller and Callie worked part-time. They had six children. Callie cared for her own family as well as Aunt Josie (whose children had died) and Grandma Lindy, Mr. Bill's mother. Somehow Callie managed to devote time to the Zeta Social Service Organization, visiting families high in the mountains.

Although my mother remembers flappers, jazz, and basement booze, life in Troutdale in the 1920s was peaceful and rich. Phipps' American Café served egg custards. Neighbors had the luxury of fresh fruit and vegetables year-round because trucker Felix Pasley traveled to Florida and brought produce. Main Street had a rooming house where train passengers slept, and when the circus came to town, children gathered to watch the acrobats unload equipment.

Families had to haul water, but Troutdale was the first town in Grayson County to have turbined electricity. Its small businesses included a hardware, grocery, grist mill, theatre, livery stable, soft drink factory, and a newspaper. Gypsies traveled through, selling pots and pans. Churches sponsored oyster suppers and dances on hardwood floors.

Troutdale's main industry was lumber, and millions of feet of it were hauled out of Virginia's forests. By the late 1920s, companies closed, profits declined, and people began to work for five cents an hour.

Callie watched the town go "down to the bottom" following the failure of the First National Bank of Troutdale and a fire that destroyed the town's furniture factories. Troutdale was having difficulty paying debts for civic improvements such as sidewalks. Roads became mudholes in winter and dust bowls in summer.

In 1930 the very existence of the town itself was threatened by a movement to eliminate the town charter, spearheaded by the personal financial interests of a candidate for mayor. A nervous contingent of pro-charterites convinced Callie to enter the race. After she won the election as a write-in candidate, *Marion Democrat* editor Sherwood Anderson wrote that Callie "became the standard bearer for those in the community who wanted to make sure that the town remained an incorporated unit."

Thirty-one citizens were eligible to vote, and Callie received seventeen votes, making her the first popularly-elected woman mayor in Virginia history.

Early on, some skeptics labeled my grandmother's newly-won post a "petticoat government." Elsie Bunn was elected recorder and treasurer, and two other women served as council members.

Sherwood Anderson sent a bold congratulatory note to Callie: "Here's to HER HONOR. Greetings, Mrs. Bill." She saw that taxes were paid, made sure the council met regularly, and assembled a mayor's court. By the time she left office, the town was lifted out of debt.

Forced to retire from the Bank of Marion in 1968, Callie continued to farm until she could no longer travel up and down the mountain. She also took care of my schizophrenic aunt before she was confined to the Marion psychiatric hospital. Callie and Mr. Bill took in roomers, including Nolan Ryan, future pitcher for the Houston Astros. As a nineteen-year-old, very homesick Texas rookie, Ryan played for the Appalachian League's Marion Mets in 1967.

After Mr. Bill died in 1972 and my aunt left, Callie lived alone. All her children and her grandson were scattered by economic necessity.

Near the end of her eventful life, Callie found friendships in her United Methodist Women's Circle, duties with Slemp Cemetery, and peace through visits by family and neighbors. Leaving six children, fourteen grandchildren, and twenty great-grandchildren, Callie died on May 10, 1986, but not before making the solid agreement that the Democrat-owned, not the Republican, funeral home in Marion provide all her burial arrangements. She is buried in Slemp Cemetery, where she pointed out to me one summer evening, "[t]here is always a nice breeze blowing."

Troutdale is still an incorporated town and has a mayor, city council, medical facility, post office, churches, its own water system, and a trading post. The town serves as a peaceful home to descendants of indigenous settlers, and displaced artisans find quiet respite there. Remembering Callie and Troutdale, I realize Sherwood Anderson got it right about the spirit of the Blue Ridge: "Quiet. Majestic. Honest . . . . The experience does not disappoint if getting away from the rat race is what you're after." But I realize my grandmother also got it right when she said to me, "Why leave heaven if you already live there?" ❖

Marilyn J. Bossmann teaches English at the University of Cincinnati. She writes fiction and conducts oral history interviews with descendants of the original settlers in Grayson and Smyth counties in Virginia.

UP ON THE BILLY

Elizabeth Hunter

The stories well up and flow from Carlean like water from a mountain spring. We are sitting in the living room in a house her husband Gerold built almost entirely by himself, without any written-down plans. The house is tucked into a steeply sloping hillside, above the little branch that chiseled the furrow between the mountain we call the Billy and a rhododendron-smothered ridge.

Nailed to the living room's exposed beams are a few of the dozens of antique tools Gerold collected. There are more down in his shop: old axes with new handles he made, draw knives, anvils, hammers. There are power tools, too: a lathe, sanders, saws. Lumber from trees he cut up on the Billy and ripped into boards in the sawmill below his son Steve's house is sorted by kind—oak, walnut, cherry—and stacked. Gerold had plans for it all. He planned to build houses for his three grandchildren. He planned to build the coffins he and Carlean would be buried in when their time came. It never occurred to him or anyone else that his time would come so soon.

Gerold and Carlean as teenagers. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Hunter.

Gerold died on March 24, 2009, five weeks before his sixty-eighth birthday, eight weeks before his and Carlean's forty-ninth wedding anniversary, just as forsythia and daffodils were filling the dooryards in the Bandana community with golden light. Five months earlier, he and Carlean had been up on the Billy when Gerold felt sick. He was carrying lengths of PVC pipe to repair the line from the spring to the reservoir; Carlean thought the pipe bouncing on his shoulder might have made him queasy. But it wasn't the pipe, or his diabetes—they came down to the house to check his sugar—or the small stroke she suspected he might have had earlier, when he told her that, for a few days, he'd had spells where he couldn't feel his arm or leg, or find his words.

What it was, the doctors discovered, was a walnut-sized tumor—inoperable, terminal—behind one ear. "The doctor said 'terminal,' but I don't think it registered with Gerold," Carlean says. They made the hour-each-way every day journey to Asheville for weeks, for punishing chemo and radiation treatments

that sapped his strength. The trips bought a couple of months, not enough time to do any of the things he'd planned—most urgently, to build his coffin. He took Carlean down to the shop and tried to tell her how to do it. "I finally had to say, 'Gerold, I can sew clothes, but I cannot do this. I wish I could, but I cannot.'"

She did everything else he asked of her, to care for him at home until he died, then to wash and shave and dress him. He wanted no funeral home, no embalming. He wanted to be laid to rest in the old way. He was a preacher, and he'd seen families spend way more than they could afford, to give their loved ones the best putting away money could buy. "He thought that was wrong," Carlean says. "He was very specific about what he wanted. He took my hands, pressed them, and said, 'We can do this, Carlean.'"

Gerold Grindstaff first laid eyes on Carlean Ensor in third grade. For Gerold, it must have been love at first sight. "He wrote me love notes, but I was too bashful to read them and threw them away," she says. At the end of the school year, Carlean's family moved to Pennsylvania and didn't return for seven years. Shortly afterward, Gerold appeared in their yard. "When he showed up," she remembers, "I'd just washed my hair."

They married in May of the year Carlean graduated from high school. They lived a year with his parents, then for twelve years in a house Gerold fixed up for them, a house once occupied by his grandparents. During their last years there, Gerold built the house their son Steve lives in now, taking out a series of small loans for materials and doing the work himself. Before he was called to preach, he worked for pay where he could: on farms, in mines, at gas stations. When he got the call, he didn't feel qualified to preach, so went back to school. He earned his GED, graduated from a Bible institute, and eventually earned advanced degrees through correspondence courses. He pastored small rural churches, sometimes two at a time, and resigned his final pastorate, at Snow Hill Baptist Church, after he got sick.

There was a quality to Gerold you couldn't miss: a quiet, barely suppressed joy in being alive. He loved a joke. He loved nature. He loved the old ways. He loved building, collecting, sowing, and reaping. He loved his family, his community, his God. "He enjoyed whatever he was doing, even if it was work," his sister Joan, two years his junior, says. "I hated hoeing, but Gerold would find something good about it."

Carlean says he saw beauty in everything. "A knotty piece of wood: he'd bring it home and clean and polish it, whether he made it into something or not. He loved pretty things—jewelry—but he loved rocks, too, not just cut and polished stones. And people! He would talk to anyone, for hours. I learned not to let him get hold of the cart in the grocery store."

Although he loved all mountains, Gerold had a particular fondness for the Billy. He acquired the land at its base from his parents, then bought the land higher up from one of his parishioners.

After Gerold got his diagnosis, he told Carlean he was going up on the Billy. Afraid he might have a seizure, she offered to go with him, but he said no. He knew the mountain like he knew his wife's face. He hauled its rock for the curved, dry stone retaining walls he built behind the house. He cut flowers there and brought them to Carlean, clutched in his hands "like a child." Carlean and Gerold hunted ginseng and picked wineberries on the Billy. The day he found leather flower, a wildflower neither of them knew, he led her to where it grew.

Trees from the Billy provided the wood to panel their walls and to build the bed Gerold and Carlean slept in upstairs. When Gerold woke, he threw off the covers, stepped out on the balcony, and shouted, "Hello, world!"

Sitting in his accustomed chair between the woodstove and the window a month before he died, Gerold asked Carlean to find a pencil and paper. She wrote down what he dictated like a poem, a final testimonial, full of salvaged sound and imagery, shot through with love and loss.

Gerold in his railroad cap. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Hunter.

Reminiscing

The passage to the garden gate, years of time,
brings back the wandering of your mind.
It brings back the screech of the gate hinges,
and with the sound comes sometimes the loneliness,
the laughter of the children's gaiety.
Sometimes you can hear the dogs barking
and the children running with joy.
You can hear the splash of the bucket in the spring,
the chickens fluttering in the dust.
Late in the fall, the crickets come to life,
the lightning bugs seeming to come to life,
sharing their mating call.
And the world passes you by.

About a week before Gerold died, Steve decided to take his father to the top of the Billy one last time. Gerold was often confused by then. Steroids bloated his features; he was both restless and weak. Carlean couldn't imagine how her son could get Gerold up there, but Steve said he would take him in his truck.

It was Gerold's last trip, the afternoon of the day he died. For the burial, Carlean and Joan dressed him in comfortable clothes. They put his favorite railroad cap on his head and closed his hands around one of the hammers he'd made a handle for. His casket was loaded onto the back of a truck. The ride to the

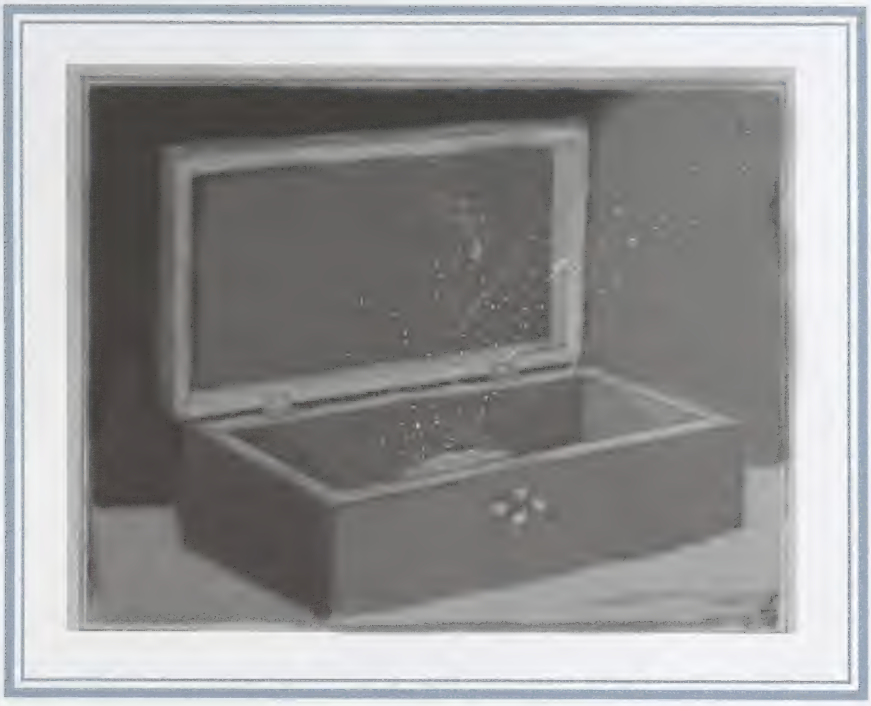
About a week before Gerold died, Steve decided to take his father to the top of the Billy one last time.

graveyard behind Silver Chapel Baptist Church took him past the homes of his son and his siblings, past the house where he'd been born and raised. In the hours since he'd died, word had gone out, and parishioners, friends, and family had gathered on the hillside. There was no church service, no bought funeral wreaths. His brother Harold spoke a few words, and Joan's son Mark, who had also received the call to preach, laid sprays of forsythia on his grave, facing sunrise over the Billy to the east.

Elizabeth Hunter is a freelance writer living in Mitchell County, North Carolina. She is a contributing editor and columnist for *Blue Ridge Country* magazine.

THE TRUHOLT MADSTONE

Rosanne Griffeth



It nestled in the back of Papa's hi-boy dresser behind his socks, rolled together like dinner rolls. Mamma taught me to fix those socks just so, laying them toe to cuff, making them eat themselves like snakes. We kept it in a box carved by great-great-grandfather. The box was black and oily, rubbed by generations of Truholts with bear grease and walnut hulls and inlaid with bits of antler from the deer the treasure came from. We went for months without thinking about our legacy—our curse—and as long as nobody got dog- or snakebit, the madstone never left that box. When it did leave the box, my aunt, Clarice, was the one who wielded it.

A madstone was a covetous thing, desired by many and held by few. It came from the belly of a fourteen-point buck felled by my ancestor with a flintlock. The size of the palm of a woman's hand, the Truholt Madstone was chalky blue and flat like a skipping pebble. Boiled in milk and laid on a wound, it drew the poison from flesh, drinking it into itself like a baby at the breast.

I was snapping beans the summer day six-year-old Davy Valentine got bit by a coonhound, gone mad in the heat of August. His brother, Jeb, came riding into our yard hellbent for leather, hollering, "Truholt! Truholt, we need the stone!"

Papa ran from the garden, going right up to Jeb's horse and grabbing it by the reins. Jeb was in a state, all shaky, pale, and tearful.

"Slow down. What happened?"

"Davy done got all bit up. It's bad, Truholt, real bad. That dog done gone mad and you gotta come, Truholt. We need the stone."

Papa nodded. I ran into the house, dug through his drawer, and pulled out the dark box. It felt warm and slick in my hands. I felt the stone's power calling

Illustration by Randy Sanders.

me. I carried the stone that day, proud my family could help. Papa hitched the pony up to the cart for the trip. Aunt Clarice joined us, hobbling from the house using her cane.

When she saw me sitting there holding the box, she said, "Lo, child, this might be the day. Does it call to you? Can you feel it?"

I nodded, gripping the box, hopeful yet afraid.

We jounced into Valentine's holler and up to their house, where the dirt yard needed sweeping and the dead hound laid, lung-shot in the dirt. White froth pooled around the muzzle of the bluetick, its eyes still open, staring into whatever eternity mad dogs faced.

White froth pooled around the muzzle of the bluetick, its eyes still open, staring into whatever eternity mad dogs faced.

The family huddled in the house, despite the heat. I heard Davy crying from the porch while Papa talked in low tones to Davy's father.The price was set at a grown hog and we went inside.

The boy stretched back on the settee, his face all red and scrunched up, tears tracking through coal dust. The dog had mauled his right thigh, grabbing him and shaking him like a kitten. It was a dreadful wound, but the likelihood of the madness with the awful thirst and shaking was worse.

Davy's ma brought out the saucepan of boiling milk and Aunt Clarice nodded at me. I opened the box, revealing the dusty blue stone. My hands trembled when I lifted it from its nest of chamois and put it in the hot milk. We waited until the stone soaked up the milk, then I reached into the pan and took it. I felt the burning for the first time.

I placed the stone on the raw meat of Davy's leg and held it there until it stuck. Finally, the stone slid from the wound.

We left them to wrap up the wound. On the way home, I felt a sudden sickness come over me. I held the stone tight in my fist as I had seen Aunt Clarice do.

She stroked my hair. I looked up to the chestnut trees, spotty sunlight hitting my eyes, feeling the stone there in my hand, quiet and curled, begging to be thrown. ❖

Rosanne Griffeth lives on the verge of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and spends her time documenting Appalachian culture and raising goats.

THE ARCH

Sean McDougle

You're the only shape I pray to.
Sam Beam

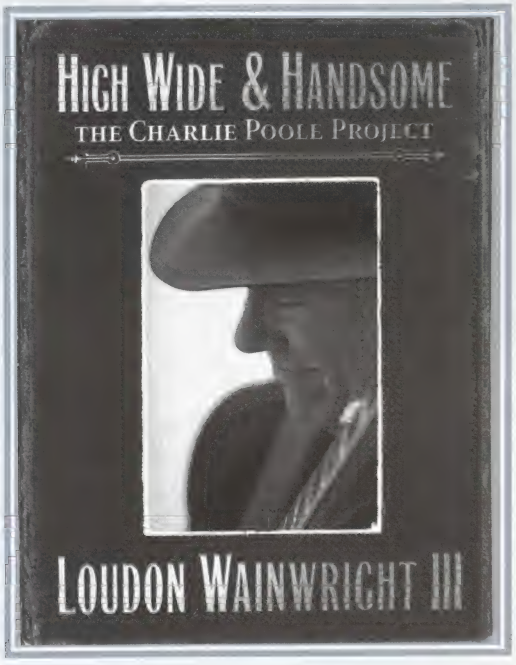
Tectonics force
femur to clavicle.
Ribs ripple through
Appalachian skin,
rise and fall,
light then dark in the valleys,
covering caves that
drip slick silver,
existing since
God erected Adam.

Her spine
bends and flattens
like He's yo-yoing
her up and down
some new life
umbilical,
determined to
bring her back.

Sean McDougle is a native of Knoxville, Tennessee, where he is currently a master's student in creative writing at the University of Tennessee.

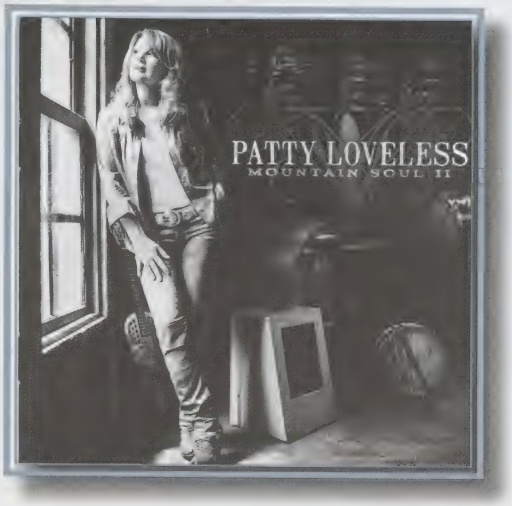
MUSIC IN BRIEF

Wayne Winkler



Loudon Wainwright III
High Wide & Handsome: The Charlie Poole Project
2nd Story Sound Records

The CD that won the 2009 Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album was an amalgamation of two seemingly disparate sources. Charlie Poole was a textile worker, a semi-pro baseball player, and an old-time banjo player. His band, the North Carolina Ramblers, made records in New York City for the Columbia label. Poole, a hard-living hell-raiser, died in 1931 at the age of thirty-nine after a thirteen-week drinking binge. Loudon Wainwright III, on the other hand, is the son of a *Life* magazine columnist, and a folksinger whose biggest commercial success was the 1972 novelty hit "Dead Skunk (In the Middle of the Road)." However, producer Dick Connette saw more connections between Poole and Wainwright than their North Carolina beginnings. Poole was known for his novelty songs like "Can I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight Mister?," "Awful Hungry Hash House," and "I'm the Man Who Rode the Mule Around the World," as well as folk music standards like "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down," "Didn't He Ramble," and "White House Blues." Wainwright began learning Poole's songs in the 1970s. He and Connette started working on *The Charlie Poole Project* in 2007. Connette said the idea was "to not just do Charlie Poole songs, or even try to pretend to be like a Charlie Poole band, [but] just bring to it what we have, work with people we already know and try out some new combinations, and also write some new stuff, write from the point of view of Charlie Poole or about Charlie Poole." Poole's songs are mixed with original material like "Way Up in NYC" (written by Connette and Wainwright), chronicling Poole and the Ramblers' first recording trip to New York, and Wainwright's "No Knees," a song about Poole and his fiddle player (and brother-in-law) Posey Rorer making moonshine and music. Critic Greil Marcus explains in the accompanying booklet what made Charlie Poole's music special: "He set you up. His banjo invited you into the music as if to a little party at the neighbor's next door, and then his easy voice took you into a back room and asked you if you wanted to see something 'interesting' and before you decided led you out the back door to look at the moon, as if it were something only you and he could see." ❖



Patty Loveless
Mountain Soul II
Saguaro Road

The sequel to Patty Loveless' 2001 *Mountain Soul* release spent eight weeks at number one on the bluegrass charts. *Mountain Soul* was a bit of a departure for Loveless, concentrating on bluegrass songs rather than the honky-tonk country style that generated hit after hit. *Mountain Soul II*, her sixteenth release, mixes classic country, mountain, and bluegrass songs with original material. Like its predecessor, *Mountain Soul II* draws on Loveless' southeast Kentucky roots. The opening track, Harlan Howard's classic "Busted," features the original lyrics about a coal mine that can no longer support the families who depend on it for a living. (Howard altered the lyrics for Johnny Cash to reflect Cash's background in cotton farming). The daughter of a coal miner who suffered from Black Lung Disease, Loveless conveys the despair that comes with knowing you can't sink any lower. "Handful of Dust" also deals with Loveless' Appalachian roots. Her rendition of Mike Henderson's "Prisoner's Tears" is an emotional and powerful discourse on the pain of love. Most striking is the three-song gospel "mini-set," comprised of "Working on a Building," "Friends in Gloryland," and "(We Are All) Children of Abraham," composed by Loveless and her husband/producer Emory Gordy, Jr. Aided by country and bluegrass legends Emmylou Harris, Vince Gill, Al Perkins, and Del and Ronnie McCoury, *Mountain Soul II* is an outstanding disc by any measure. ❖

The Dixie Bee-Liners
Susanville
Pinecastle Records

The 2008 Roots Music Association's Artists of the Year have released a collection of songs centered on the road—journeys, destinations, and stops along the way. Band founders Brandi Hart and Buddy Woodward, along with Rachel Renee Johnson, Jeremy Darrow, Casey Henry, Robin Davis, and producer Bil VornDick, tell the stories of people on the move along the nation's highways. The vignettes unfold across the nineteen songs on the disc, combining to create what Woodward calls "a soundtrack to a movie that plays in your mind." Employing trademark soaring harmonies, stunningly beautiful songwriting, and instrumentation that includes cellos, dulcimers, and bouzoukis, the stories on *Susanville* unfold in songs like "Enter Highway," "Road Hog," "(I Need) Eighteen Wheels," "Trixie's Diesel-Stop Café," and "Destination." "Concept" albums are uncommon in country music and even more so in bluegrass. The music on *Susanville* is as daring as the idea. ❖

The Long River Home

By Larry Smith

Bottom Dog Press, Working Lives Series
Huron, Ohio, 2009
$16 (paper), $22.00 (hardcover), 240 pages

Larry Smith's latest novel, *The Long River Home*, is a story that will be familiar to those who call Appalachia their home. Set in the Ohio River Valley region, the narrative follows four generations of the McCall family through farm life, poverty, family turmoil, and unstable employment in steel mills and coal mines.

In 1861 Andy McCall is only six years old when his dispassionate father walks away from their farm one morning and never returns. Andy is left alone with a mother who is ailing and depressed from the recent loss of a baby. She sleeps day and night and no longer gets out of bed to feed or care for Andy. He attempts to feed himself and his mother with food from their garden. In a few months, both of them are starving and living in squalor, and his mother has slipped into psychosis. When a military officer comes to the cabin to deliver the news that Andy's father has been killed in battle, Andy's deplorable living conditions are discovered, and the small town sends him to an orphanage and his mother to an institution. So begins the McCall family's unique story.

Andy's traumatic beginning in life results in emotional consequences that flow like a river downstream to his children and grandchildren. The reader sees and feels the disturbing results of Andy's childhood, as well as his inability to stay in one place and choose reliable jobs that will allow him to provide for his family. His descendants search for the parental love Andy just cannot give. Some family members work too much or try too hard, in a futile effort to get affection and acknowledgment from Andy, but they are invariably left hurt and confused when the love and recognition never come. Others struggle with drinking problems or get into scrapes with the law. Pride or, more often, embarrassment in family motivates some members, while rebellion drives others.

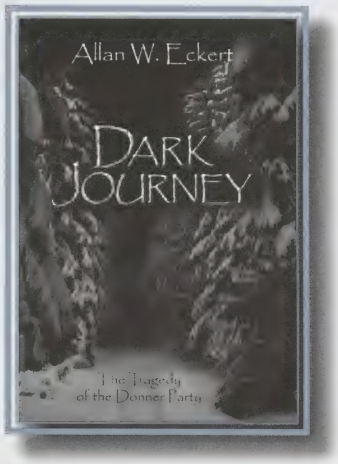
On the rare occasions when Andy's sons become recipients of a small scrap of praise from their father, the reader feels the surprise of his sons at the unexpected affection. It's almost as if Andy has accidentally forgotten himself and given his children a tiny bit of the approval they want so badly.

Andrew McCall's sons do not want to be like him, but when they have sons of their own, they find that being a father is an infinitely complicated undertaking, especially when your own father has not set a good example of how a man should love his sons.

The story dramatizes sensitively the irony of Andrew's being judged harshly by his sons for not giving them the time or attention they needed when Andrew himself never knew the love and attentiveness of a good and caring father.

The Long River Home touches on themes that are perhaps especially meaningful to people of the Appalachian region, where lives are lived between the contrast of the beautiful, and sometimes wild, land and the pervasive poverty of varying degrees, depending on whether the coal mines or mills are hiring or laying off at any given time. But the reader does not have to be from Appalachia to appreciate the similarities to the issues that many families face, no matter where they live or how much money they have. Indeed by the end of this novel we are all made heartbreakingly aware that employment, security, love, life, and family dynamics advance and recede, ebb and flow, like the waters of the great Ohio River that runs through the McCall family homeland. ❖

Linda Mays is an aspiring fiction writer who lives near Huntington, West Virginia, having returned home after living in southern California, northern Ohio, and coastal North Carolina. She is currently participating in the West Virginia Writers Project.



Dark Journey: The Tragedy of the Donner Party

By Allan W. Eckert, edited by Thayle Anderson
Jesse Stuart Foundation,
Ashland, Kentucky, 2009
$25 (hardbound), 334 pages

Allan W. Eckert's new book, a detailed account of the Donner-Reed Party's tragedy in seeking passage "over the jagged peaks of the high Sierras" to the dreamland of California during the winter of 1846-47, reads like an epistolary novel of journal entries. In spite of twenty-three pages of "Amplification Notes" (including a five-page chronology of the statistical make-up of the Donner Party from inception to conclusion) and a four-page "Index of Characters," the story often reaches beyond elaborate documentation to the vigor of an adventure tale, one that culminates in instances of murder, cannibalism, and other extremes of survival.

In Eckert's epic account, we begin by following part of the rambling life, in 1844, of one lone mountain man, James Clyman. When Clyman meets the Donner-Reed Party in May of 1846, he cautions the party's leaders against taking the now infamous Hastings Cut-off, touted in those days as saving several hundreds of miles for travelers to California, from Independence, Missouri, via the Oregon Trail. Hastings' *Emigrants' Guide* claimed his "cut-off" expedited arrival at the southerly fork of the California Trail, a claim that, at the time his 1842 guidebook was published, he himself had not tested. In 1846, after having followed the "cut-off" in reverse order, before the onset of deep winter snows, without heavy covered wagons but with guides and packhorses, some of Hastings' own party, which included Clyman, swore never to try that again. Eckert makes clear that it is the Donner-Reed Party's decision to follow the Hastings Cut-off and their late start over the high Sierras that leads to their tragedy.

Adding to the atmosphere of Eckert's book is the use of chapter headings subdivided with journal entry dates such as at the outset of the book: "Prologue [April 27, 1835- Monday]." Further, his use of the present tense throughout each subsequent entry adds to the immediacy of the reading experience. Eckert's familiar and wordy style, similar to the diaries and journals he cites, keeps the illusion going throughout his chronicle.

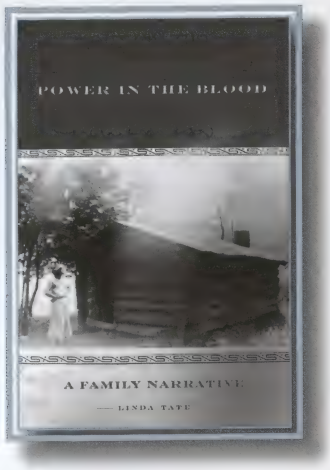
Much like the early travel accounts of curious eastern tourists, academics, and journalists into the mountain towns and wilds of West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina, the travelers in Eckert's latest installment of the *Winning of America* saga have a marveling, sometimes condescending, often objectifying attitude toward the flora, fauna, and folks who call the areas home.

His account of the reaction of the travelers to the "barely human creatures" whom some of the Donner-Reed Party called "Diggers"—the nomadic Indians that "have lost the use of fire" and "seem focused on survival alone"—parallels attitudes of the early curiosity seekers, investors, and industrialist scouts who sought land and natural resources from the people and terrain of the southern mountains of Appalachia.

The tragic nature of the story notwithstanding, there are lighthearted moments early in the voyage. While on the banks of the Platte River, the travelers describe the buffalo droppings, dubbed "buffalo chips" and "cakes" for their large size and appreciated for their usefulness as fuel for campfires. The botanical accounts of teacher Tamsen Donner, wife of George Donner, create some of the story's lightest moments. She records finding "a beautiful flower resembling the bloom of a beech tree, but in bunches large as a small sugarloaf, and of every variety of shade to red and green. I botanize and read some, but cook a heap more." Before the hierarchy of the twenty-three-wagon Donner-Reed Party begins to break down, the presence of James Reed's giant luxury "Pioneer Palace Car," a wagon of double "decks" capable of comfortably housing and sleeping several of the wealthier families, carries a farcical humor as it trudges across the plains, hauled by four teams of oxen.

On balance, lightheartedness, errors in judgment, naiveté, longing for the unseen, pride, stubbornness of purpose, human drive, and splendor of detail combine in Allan W. Eckert's newest historical record of the famous Donner-Reed Party. It is an often gripping, if occasionally heart-sickening, venture into one of America's darkest, most controversial chapters of westward expansion. ❖

Ron Houchin lives in South Point, Ohio. His most recent poetry collection is *Museum Crows*, published by Salmon Press.



Power in the Blood: A Family Narrative

By Linda Tate
Ohio University Press
Athens, Ohio, 2009
$22.95 (paperback), $46.95 (hardcover), 229 pages

Linda Tate's gripping family history is an amalgam of scholarly sleuthing, richly imaginative embellishment, and sheer psychological grit that delves deeply into family legend to produce a narrative both reflective and transcending of the Appalachian region. It is a story told through the consciousness of three strong women: Tate's great-great-grandmother Louisiana, her grandmother Fannie, and Tate herself. Interwoven with the imagined oral histories of the two grandmothers is the author's personal story, all stitched together like the threads of a richly patterned quilt—the two ancestors' stories providing the underfabric for Tate's own story.

Tate writes of her attempt to piece together Louisiana's and Fannie's lives in order to explore her own. "The majority of the resulting book is 'true,'" she explains, "in the sense that it recounts people, names, dates, experiences, and even very small details that were passed to me through written documentation, through oral history, through artifacts . . . . Thus, what I offer here is not genealogical fact others can use as the basis of their own research but rather a work of historically informed imagination." If the reader wonders about the degree of "informed imagination" used to create the story, Tate responds that none of us "knows the truth of our own life in all its many nuances."

As Tate explores the nooks and crannies of family stories, as she searches for the Cherokee and Scots-Irish footprints that lead to more stories, her fundamental object is to uncover and understand the secrets of her own immediate history and expunge the demons that haunt her memories and dreams. The answers she finds are surprising, with clues leading from the sexual abuse of Louisiana's daughters by her husband George to Tate's beloved grandmother Fannie and finally to her own father. As in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, these family tragedies lurk in the shadows and assail the consciousness of a family in peril.

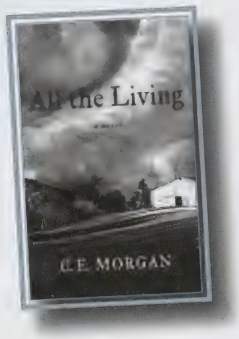
Lee Smith writes on the book jacket of *Power in the Blood* that it is a "big, human, and entirely revelatory book," showing how family secrets can affect generation after generation. Yet Smith insists that Tate doesn't "lay blame or make judgments; she shows real wisdom and compassion throughout." Likewise, Tate is careful to connect the unfeeling and objectifying dimensions of racism, experienced through Louisiana's Cherokee side of the family, with the more silent and insidious sexual abuse that can infect a family—both manifestations of the cold, unfeeling "otherness" we assign to those we abuse.

Written in a lucid prose style, this family legend is remarkably understated. The stories are told in the voices of the three women, with Louisiana's and Fannie's stories written in heavy dialect. If one finds any criticism to render in such a candid and revelatory narrative, it is that the dialect is perhaps too rigorously delineated, making these women's voices, and perhaps their stories, less, rather than more, authentic. Nonetheless, Tate's book about family and about self is brilliantly told, and the reader discovers there is, indeed, "power in the blood," which extends beyond generations and beyond place. Such power is as enigmatic and complex, as inescapable and omnipresent as our DNA. It molds and shapes us, haunts our dreams, and invades our waking moments as effortlessly as breathing. It is a power, in some cases, to be both embraced and surpassed. ❖

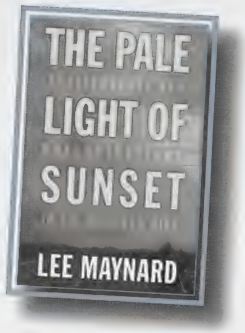
Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt, professor of English at West Virginia's Shepherd University, teaches Appalachian literature and directs the Appalachian Heritage Writers Project and Appalachian Studies Program.

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Edwina Pendarvis

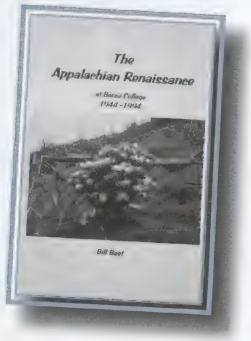


All the Living
C.E. Morgan (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009)

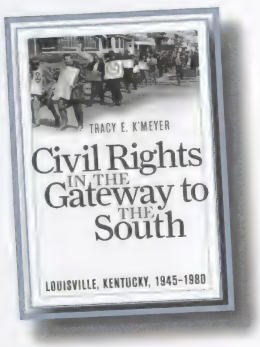


The Pale Light of Sunset: Scattershots and Hallucinations in an Imagined Life
Lee Maynard (Vandalia Press, 2009)

The young woman in C.E. Morgan's first novel (winner of the Appalachian Studies Association's Weatherford Prize for Fiction in 2010) and the young man in Lee Maynard's third novel seek a family and a place for themselves. The young woman, an orphan, moves onto a farm with her lover and though tempted at first to leave him and the farm, she comes to define herself in terms of the joys and sorrows of their life together. The young man leaves home for a life of adventure. Morgan's heroine is as gutsy as Maynard's hero, even if her adventures are less flamboyant. Maynard's prose in *The Pale Light of Sunset* is fast-paced, a combination of tall tale and action movie. (One of Maynard's fans says to readers of this book, "Breathe deeply, buckle up, and hold on.") Morgan's prose in *All the Living* takes its sweet time and describes in rich detail a deeper, more inward-looking, but no less exciting, geography. Both novels reflect the strong hold that machismo still has on the popular imagination, but if you don't think too much about what's to the right or to the left of the road in regard to sexual politics, you can enjoy these stories greatly, following them around hairpin curves to their somewhat unsettling conclusions. ❖

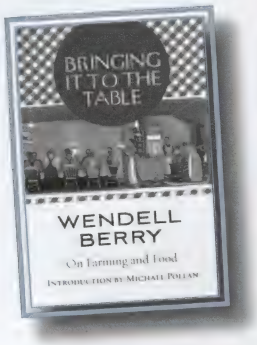


The Appalachian Renaissance at Berea College, 1944 – 1994
Bill Best (Appalachian Imprints, 2009)

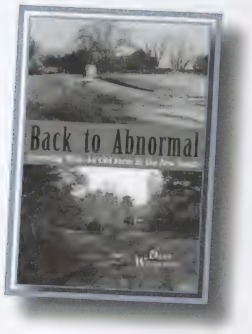


Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South: Louisville, Kentucky, 1945 – 1980
Tracy E. K'Meyer (The University Press of Kentucky, 2009)

Both these books feature Kentucky settings and span a similar time period, but they are about as different as two books of history can be. Best's book uses informal memoir to give an impressionistic account of Berea College during the period in which the study of Appalachia by Appalachians began in earnest. K'Meyer's book uses a formal case study approach, based on extensive participant interviews, to document the history of the civil rights struggle in Louisville from post-World War II through the most turbulent years of a continuing fight for racial equality. Best's book reads like a "who's who" of Appalachian studies, and K'Meyer's book brings into the limelight Louisvillians who are probably unknown even to scholars of the region's history. What these books have in common is their keen understanding of the difficulties encountered by people who saw a need for change in their communities and who successfully brought change about. Both books take readers "behind the scenes" and thus offer insights into the modern history of these two iconic locales as well as into the process of change itself. ❖



Bringing it to the Table: On Farming and Food
Wendell Berry (Counterpoint Press, 2009)



Back to Abnormal: Surviving with an Old Farm in the New South
Dana Wildsmith (Motes Books, 2010)

Wendell Berry may be one of this country's best-loved farmers, but Dana Wildsmith must be among the best-liked. While Berry's prose is often acerbic in its analysis of what's happening to farmland, Wildsmith's prose stays pretty much to the sunny side. Both, however, have a practical regard for the land that grows out of long and close acquaintance with it. Berry's book focuses on farming, farmers, and food. Wildsmith's book has little to say about any of these but a lot to say about life on her patch of land in North Georgia. The humane and humorous perspective of *Back to Abnormal* can be summed up as "what doesn't kill me makes me smile." Tenderness prevails, even toward timber rattlers and poison ivy. *Bringing it to the Table* is vintage Berry in more than one sense. Grounded in his deep understanding of the need for ecological integrity in farming methods and in our choices about what food to consume, it includes essays from as early as the 1970s (and as late as 2006) as well as excerpts from a half-dozen of his novels and stories. As Michael Pollan's introduction suggests, this collection offers wisdom and beauty; its language is "as patient and logical, as plumb and square and scrupulous, as well-planed woodwork." ❖

The Dancing Dragon Poems
Victor M. Depta (Blair Mountain Press, 2010)

Here and Gone: New and Selected Poems
Don Johnson (Louisiana Literature Press, 2009)

These two poetry books go far beyond the borders of the Appalachian region. The rhymed poems of Depta's *Dancing Dragon* make up a kind of "garden of verses" for adults. His poems bound imaginatively from the earth to the sky and back in idiosyncratic flights of fancy that are funny and sad, subtle and blunt, and often as whimsical as promised by such titles as "The Dragon's Toady Self," "The Dragon at Sea World," and "The Dragon in the Shagbark Hickory." Johnson's *Here and Gone* poems stay closer to the earth in their concerns, but in some of his poems that earth is far away from Appalachia, as far away as the island earth of Hawaii and New Zealand. The testaments to the feeling and integrity of ordinary lives—the poetic sifting of mementos of friendship and family that we associate with literature from this region—are here in Johnson's work and are rendered with sensitivity and deft artistry. These two collections of poetry offer quite different kinds of music. They remind me of two instruments (happily, with names that rhyme). *Here and Now* has the intimate resonance of an acoustic guitar, and *Dancing Dragon* the esoteric tones of an Indian sitar. ❖

STILL BILL

Brad Lifford

Chances are the majority of music listeners know his voice. But it's just as likely that Bill Withers could walk down the busiest street in America and never be recognized, much less approached for an autograph.

A new film about the man who created a handful of the most indelible songs of the past forty years could, and should, change that. West Virginia native Bill Withers—of "Ain't No Sunshine" and "Lean on Me" fame—is the subject of *Still Bill*.

When the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame screened *Still Bill* in March of 2010 at Tamarack, the state's stronghold of Appalachian art and culture, there was barely a seat to be had in a 200-seat auditorium. The people of Beckley know what this native son of Slab Fork, a township of Beckley, is all about.

Michael Lipton, executive director of the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame, said volumes in one sentence in the theater lobby after the screening.

"We keep looking for chinks in his armor," he said, only a few feet from a glass display case containing a collection of memorabilia from the singer's career.

At Tamarack, Lipton and a host of notable West Virginia musicians warmed up the auditorium with covers of Withers songs. Then the audience sat back for *Still Bill*, made by two documentarians who followed Withers around for two years and captured his thoughts on family, life, career—the latter cut short by disputes with the recording industry. Withers lives in comfort in a hillside Los Angeles home, but he hasn't made a record since 1985.

Though Withers is product of the Appalachian mountains, he hasn't been a West Virginia resident for decades. Much of the footage captured by filmmakers Damani Baker and Alex Vlack was shot in California.

Fame did not come early for Withers, so he had a grounded perspective when it did. After a stint in the Navy, he got a job in California installing toilets in airplanes. It was a good job, but Withers believed he could make it as a musician and experimented by playing at a few clubs.

In his early 30s, he started toting his guitar and songs to record companies. In *Still Bill*, he recalls his thought process and his message to record executives: "I decided it would be nice to get in the record business . . . . But I figured if they didn't want to do it the way I want to do it, then I've got a job making these toilets, so I don't need your cash."

Withers became a staple of Top 40 radio, his resonant, laid-back tenor driving the simple but powerful lyrics of "Lean on Me," "Ain't No Sunshine," "Just the Two of Us," and the more obscure gem "Grandma's Hands." Yet there were always experts who thought they could make him better. Perhaps they didn't know that if Bill Withers had anything, it was a sense of identity.

Legendary singer/songwriter Bill Withers exults at the sounds in the recording studio at his Los Angeles home. Photo courtesy Late Nights and Weekends Productions.

He laughs, remembering those who wanted to shape him into something other than a singer-songwriter.

"They got the R&B guys," Withers says, "and the guys I called 'blaxperts,' who were white guys who tried to tap into your black psyche."

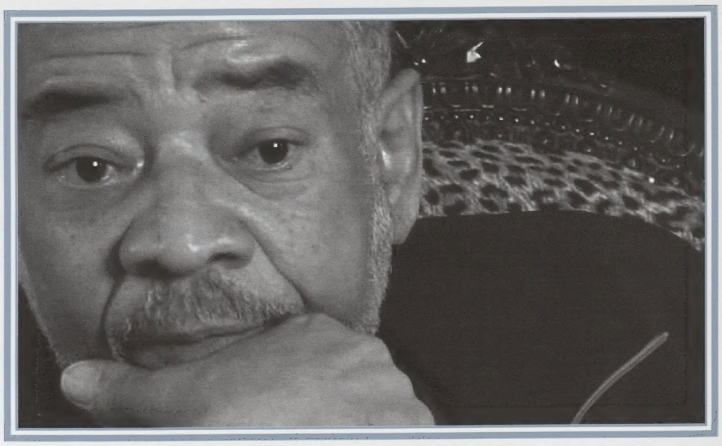
There isn't a single wasted minute in *Still Bill*. Withers' thoughts on his own life and life in general are unforced and arresting. From his formative days in Slab Fork, he knows about the stigma attached to stuttering. In the film, he visits a school group for children and teens who stutter. When they sing for him, it brings him to tears. The wounds he felt from growing up with a stutter—he remembers being told constantly to "just spit it out"—were enough to send him far away, toward the West Coast.

The filmmakers followed him back to Slab Fork when he visited for a class reunion, and those parts of the film are the best. Slab Fork, population 203, is a relic of the coal age, a company town where residents worked in the mines, bought almost everything they needed from the company store, and lived in rowhouses owned by the mining company. Withers grew up in a mining family, surrounded by twelve brothers and sisters.

"All my dreams I just kept to myself," he says. "I just wanted to leave and go start over with some new people."

But any wounds Withers endured while growing up don't sully his return. He visits with old friends still living in the township, walks along the railroad tracks like he did when he was a boy, and talks about damming up a nearby creek and swimming naked. He even makes light of growing up black in a mostly white area. Most times, he says, kids of both races ignored segregation when it came time to play: "After a day of working in the coal mines, everybody came out black. We were all black people."

Later in the film, Withers and a friend visit a nearby cemetery, walking beyond low-cut grass and



headstones into an area overgrown with weeds and low trees. Withers is struggling to find the graves of his family in the cemetery for African Americans, where no path is carved through the underbrush.

Memories of Slab Fork moved Withers to write "Grandma's Hands," and the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame exhibit unveiled that night in March featured two items related to the song. One was a painting that draws from the song's title, showing an aged woman mending the pants of a child bent over her knee. Withers, among the initial Hall of Fame inductees in 2007, donated the painting to the hall. He had hired artist Ernie Barnes to paint it, and it was Barnes' last major commissioned piece before his death in 2009. Also on display was a signed copy of Withers' original handwritten lyrics for "Grandma's Hands."

Still Bill reminds viewers of an aging but timeless voice. It reveals the remarkable man behind the voice, and best of all, it can introduce young people to someone who is worth all the fame and celebrity that came to him.

Even if he returned to the public eye, Bill Withers would not want anyone to hang on his every word. When you watch *Still Bill*, it's hard not to. ❖

Brad Lifford is media relations coordinator at East Tennessee State University.

Bill Withers ponders a question during filming of the documentary "Still Bill.." Photo courtesy Late Nights and Weekends Productions.

BEANS ALL THE WAY

New Film Examines an East Tennessee Soup Bean Variant

Brad Lifford

For a film to succeed, it must affect the viewer in some way: It must make us weep, make us laugh, make us love, even cause us to curse the screen.

After spending twenty minutes with *Beans All the Way: A Story of Pintos and Persistence*, I was starved.

Starved for a bowl of beans unlike any I have had before, despite an East Tennessee upbringing that guaranteed I would face a bowl of them at least once a week. *Beans All the Way*, a new documentary produced by East Tennessee State University, illuminates a restaurant in Greeneville, Tennessee, that has been serving up soup beans so unique that one well-traveled food writer calls The Bean Barn his favorite restaurant.

The Bean Barn is married perfectly with the legume that birthed it. Like the pinto bean itself, the restaurant could not be more unassuming. Drivers passing by the white, unremarkable building on East Church Street might not give it a second glance.

Beans All the Way begins with a hand reverently tossing dry beans onto the gravestones of Romie and Zella Mae Britt. It then takes viewers inside The Bean Barn and illustrates well the history and the lasting appeal.

A bowl of Beans All the Way consists of pinto beans ladled into a bowl that already contains a scoop of broth and one potato from The Bean Barn's homemade beef stew. The whole thing is topped with diced onions. Romie and Zella Mae owned Britt's Grill and first began serving these souped-up soup beans in the 1950s after another Greenevillian, Reagan Walker, came up with the recipe.

Jerry and Donna Hartsell have owned The Bean Barn since 1981. They may have changed the name to better reflect what brings people back, but the spirit remains unaltered.

"The pots are the same ones I used when I first took over," Jerry says.

Inside the restaurant, Scott Niswonger, a regular, speaks in the film of the place's down-home appeal, reveals his favorite meal (a cheeseburger and French fries AND beans), and comes forth with a frank admission. This philanthropist and owner of a multi-million-dollar freight company relies on The Bean Barn when entertaining out-of-towners: "I have people in from all over the world, and if we're going to have one meal, we have it here."

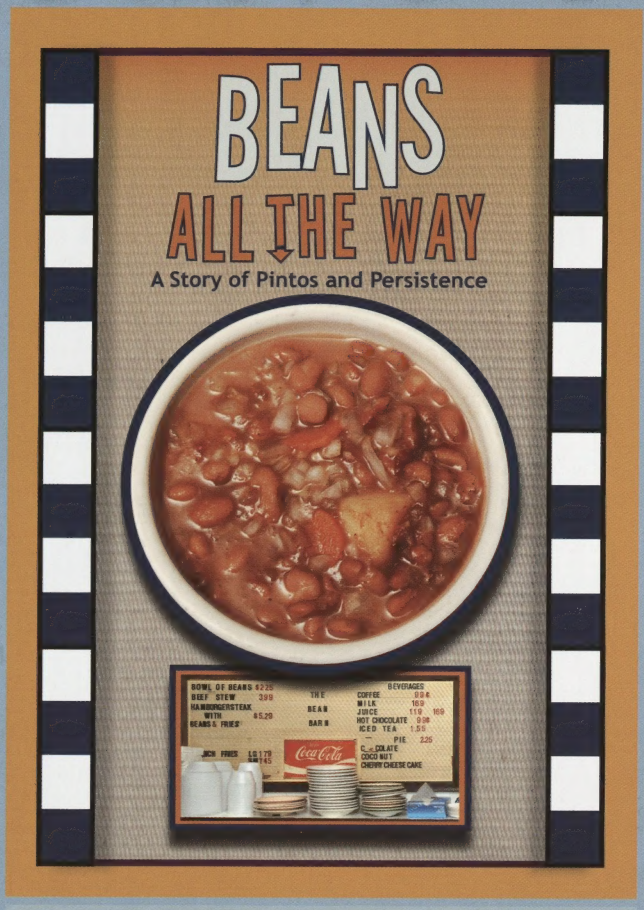
The Bean Barn is a place where lawyers, house painters, and high school students gather elbow to elbow at the counter to spoon from bowls that speak to earthy flavor, to a sense of place and home, and to that Southern Appalachian tradition of taking the cheaper and more humble products yielded by Mother Nature and making something priceless.

The footage of silky soup beans, the cornbread sidekick, and the cheeseburger should be enough to make any viewer yearn for a place at the table. ❖

Brad Lifford is media relations coordinator at East Tennessee State University.

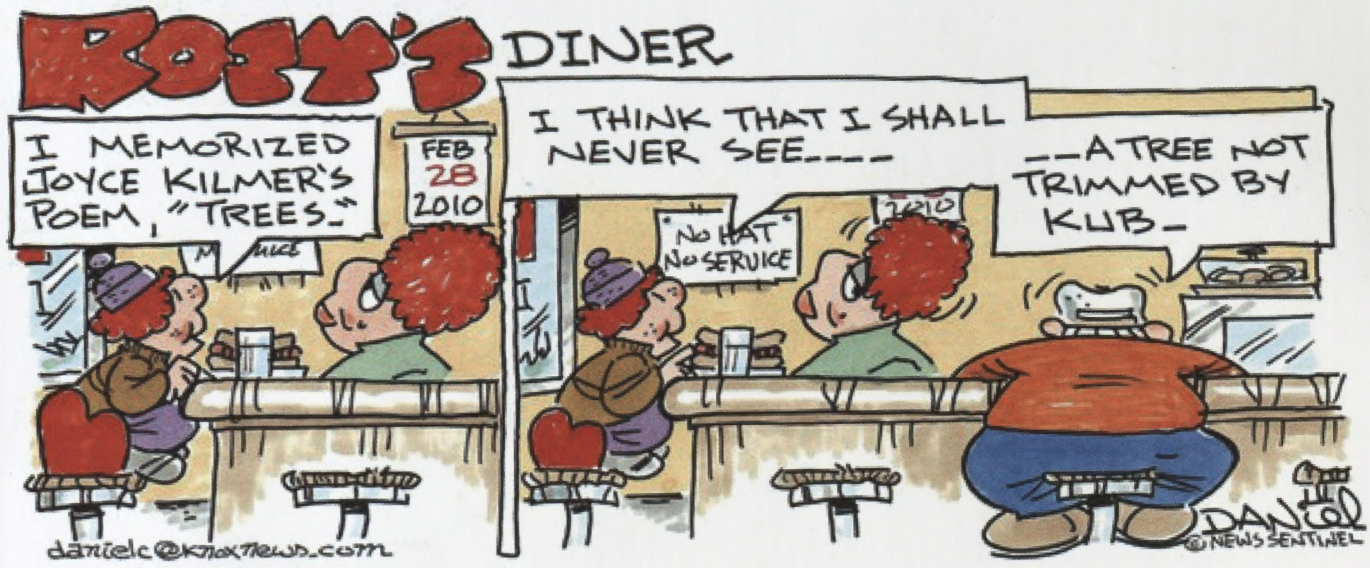
Jerry and Donna at the counter with customers. Photo courtesy Larry Smith.

SIGNING OFF



A little beef stew in the bottom of the bowl. A ladle of lard-seasoned soup beans. A scattering of onions. The belly-filling, soul-enriching combination is called Beans All the Way, and this film tells its story at The Bean Barn in Greeneville, Tennessee. Order online at www.etsustore.com

As we sign off with this issue, we wonder if **YOU** have a favorite local eatery—a place that stirs your gastronomic passions. If so, share that place with your fellow readers by posting it to the *Now & Then* Facebook page.



Note: "KUB" (referenced above) is an acronym for "Knoxville Utilities Board."
Cartoon courtesy Charles Daniel, *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

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